

S T A N D A R D
N O V E L S.

N° XLVI.

"No kind of literature is so generally attractive as Fiction. Pictures of life and manners, and Stories of adventure, are more eagerly received by the many than graver productions, however important these latter may be. APULEIUS is better remembered by his fable of Cupid and Psyche than by his abstruser Platonic writings; and the Decameron of BOCCACCIO has outlived the Latin Treatises, and other learned works of that author."

THE PARSON'S DAUGHTER.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, 8. NEW BURLINGTON STREET
(SUCCESSOR TO HENRY COLBURN):

BELL AND BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH;
CUMMING, DUBLIN.

1835.



J. Cawse, pinx:

- J. W. Leek, sculp:

THE PARSON'S DAUGHTER.

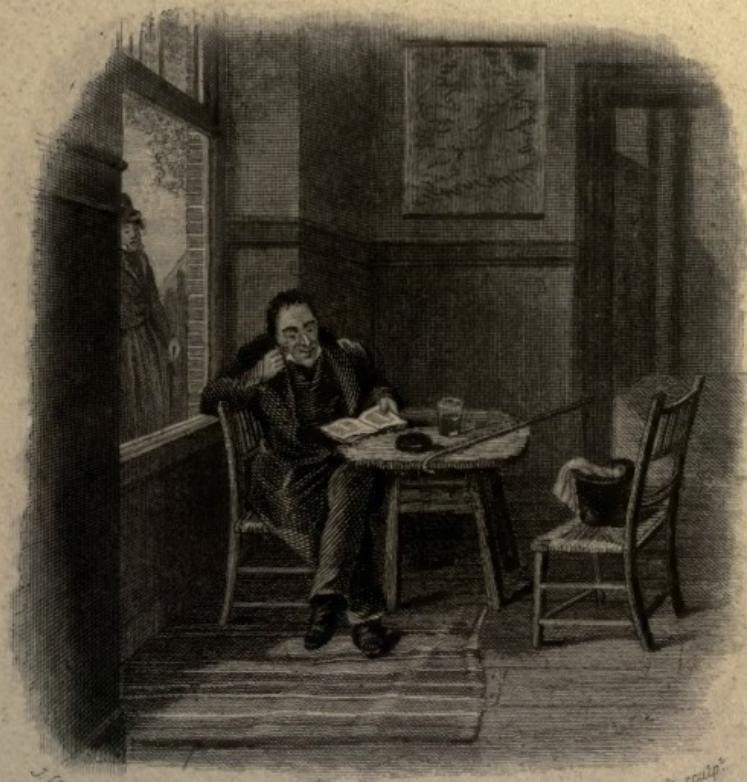
Miss Tarman, extended at her ease in a huge arm chair, moved neither hand nor foot during her oration, but only turned her head or her neck, pivot wise, towards her toady, Miss Budd, whenever she wanted a refreshener for her memory.

THE PARSON'S DAUGHTER;

A NOVEL.

BY

THEODORE HOOK.



J. George pinc.

J. W. Cook, sculp.

What should greet his eyes, as he passed from the Castle to the Inn, but a tall, black-haired man, sitting curled up at a window airing himself, and reading a two year old number of Blackwood? It was the truant Doctor Alexander Mac Gopus himself.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY.

(SUCCESSION TO H. COLBURN.)

CUMMING, DUBLIN, - BELL & BRADBURY, EDINBURGH.

GALIGNANI, PARIS.

1835.



THE
PARSON'S DAUGHTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"SAYINGS AND DOINGS," "MAXWELL,"
&c.

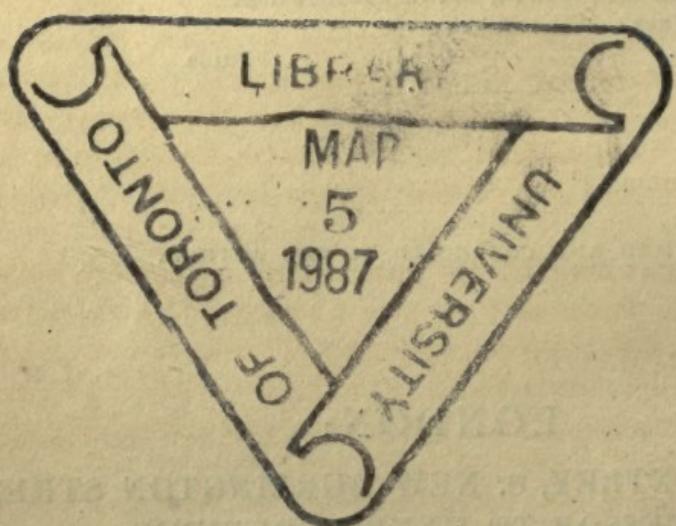
" One child he had, a daughter chaste and fair,
His age's comfort, and his fortune's heir.
They call'd her EMMA : — "

PRIOR.

REVISED AND CORRECTED BY THE AUTHOR.

LONDON:
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BELL AND BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH;
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1835.



THE

PARSON'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

“ Is not the elder
By nature pointed out for preference ?
Is not his right enrolled amongst those laws
Which keep the world's vast frame in beauteous order ? ”
ROWE.

“ IN France,” says one of the most accomplished writers of the day, treating of French statistics, “ there is no primogeniture ;” a startling fact at first sight, but for which, upon a little consideration, we can find an easy solution. The fair authoress means to say that there is no law of primogeniture in that happy and well-regulated country.

We have not the slightest intention of going into a discussion upon the merits of such a law, or the advantages of its abrogation ; but we have to put before the reader an example of the effects which its existence sometimes produces, in the person of the Right Honourable Lady Frances Sheringham.

He who denounced commingled pride and poverty as one of the bitterest curses of mankind, could never have found a better illustration of his principle than in the daughter of a nobleman, accustomed through life to all the splendour and luxury properly incidental to her station, mixing in society on terms of equality with all that is great and gay by which she is surrounded, suddenly

bereft, by the death of her father, of all the advantages and conveniences of the paternal roof, and sent forth upon the world by an elder brother (now become alike the depositary of all the family wealth as well as all the family honours), to seek protection and a home.

To this disadvantage (the only one, perhaps, of the scheme of society to which it belongs) may be attributed many of those ill-assorted matches made by ladies of quality, and the innumerable indiscretions and even faults sometimes too justly ascribed to the younger branches of noble families. They are, in fact, proud and poor ; and the desire of maintaining an appearance commensurate with the rank and station to which they were born, without the adequate means of doing so fairly and prudently, leads them into excesses and difficulties which not unfrequently bring the honorary titles, which they by courtesy assume, into contempt and ridicule.

But if these happen to be the results of indiscretions committed by persons of high notions and low means, of large expenses and small incomes, who, regardless of those considerations by which more honestly-inclined and better regulated persons may be supposed to shape their career through life, launch into extravagances unjustifiable by their finances, what must be the pain and mortification of a noble lady, who, satisfied of the irreproachability of her conduct, full of the consciousness of her nobility, sensitively alive to the respect due to her exalted rank, and anxious beyond measure to maintain the place in society to which her birth entitles her, feels herself so constrained by circumstances as to be unable to move with comfort or even ease in the sphere to which she hereditarily belongs, and who, after having married for love, finds herself at fifty-four a widow, still handsome in person and vivacious in disposition, with a penniless son of five-and-twenty, and a jointure of six hundred pounds per annum.

Such was exactly the position of Lady Frances Sheringham a few years since, as the daughter of the Marquess of Pevensey. She had been the belle of her time, had given the tone to society and her name to bonnets, and, with some of the yet surviving beaux of a previous age, had

been, in her day, when *she* was eighteen, and men drank wine, a “standing toast.”

Like herself, the husband of Lady Frances was of noble blood. The Honourable Herbert Sheringham was the second son of Lord Weybridge, and had borne off his charming prize from a host of ardent rivals in all the enthusiasm of triumphant love; nor was their mutual happiness marred for an hour until the death of his noble father-in-law, the Marquess, with whom they had almost entirely lived after their marriage: that melancholy event, however, reduced the honourable husband and his right honourable wife to the necessity of establishing *themselves*, and, moreover, of supporting *themselves* upon an income not exceeding twelve hundred pounds per annum.

The personal fortune of Lady Frances was neither more nor less than ten thousand pounds settled upon herself. Mr. Sheringham's income was derived from two offices which he held about the court, luckily just so unimportant as not to be affected by any change of ministry, but which pleased his vanity and amused his mind, by bringing him frequently in contact with his sovereign, and the circle by which he was surrounded. To what particular circumstances he was indebted for these small advantages nobody ever exactly ascertained, because his father, besides having very little interest, professed whiggism in politics, which, however meritorious abstractedly as a trait of virtue, patriotism, and magnanimity, does not of itself appear a sufficient reason for his son's appointment to two *quasi* sinecures during the existence of a Tory government. It was generally thought that Lady Frances, anxious to make the man of her heart something, had exerted that influence which such a being could not fail to possess, to gain the ear of one at whose disposal such advantages are placed.—No matter, Sheringham and the Lady Frances were as happy a couple as are ordinarily seen in this world; and when he was called away to a better, the recollection that she had nothing left to live upon but her jointure (arising chiefly from her own fortune, which, as has just been stated, had been settled upon herself) of six hundred

a-year, was not the most painful one with which her ladyship had to contend.

Besides this jointure, Mr. Sheringham left Lady Frances one son, the counterpart of his lamented sire, in whom all her hopes and wishes for the future centred ; and as her grief for the death of her husband wore off, the feeling of deep regret for one she had lost gave place to another of intense anxiety for the welfare and success of him who was yet preserved to her.

And as he grew up, so did that anxiety grow too. At Eton he received all he ever had of education ; and when, at his father's death, it became necessary for his mother to come to some decision as to his future prospects, the struggle with her feelings was by no means an agreeable one. Fortune he had none, save what might be left at his mother's disposal when she should shuffle off this mortal coil ; and as for a profession, the idea that her beloved George Augustus Frederick should be obliged to do any thing to earn his bread was most repugnant to her ladyship's principles and feelings. Her brother, the Marquess of Pevensey, was extremely kind to his nephew, and she hoped for some assistance from him ; but what could *he* do ? he was himself married, and had already nine right honourable lords and ladies to provide for ; and as for interest he had none, since, like her late father-in-law, his lordship was a rigid oppositionist, but without either talent or influence sufficient to alarm his adversaries into an adoption of the soothing system.

George Augustus Frederick, however, having in the course of his domiciliation at Eton contracted a love of boating, and having, moreover, once worn the uniform of a naval officer at one of those morning masquerades peculiar to that great and celebrated school, had taken it into his head that he should like to be a sailor ; and although the Lady Frances greatly objected to the filthy smell of ships, and the horrid sickness at sea, and the danger of battles, and all the other evils “fishified flesh” is heir to, the recollection of Howe, and Duncan, and Nelson counteracted in some degree her aversion from the service ; and at length, by dint of solicitation on the part of the boy, and persuad-

sion on that of her friends, George Augustus Frederick was fairly launched as a midshipman, under the especial care and protection of her friend and distant relation the Honourable Captain Baltyorum.

The great affair of George Augustus Frederick Sheringham's start in life, unpromising as it was, having been achieved, Lady Frances began *her* course of existence, which comprised a round of visits, a month at Lord Pevensey's — a fortnight with the Dawsons in Gloucestershire — three weeks with the Howards in Derbyshire — ten days at one house and six days at another, till the London season began, when, with a pair of job horses doing sixteen weeks' work in three months, and rooms at a hotel, where she never dined, her ladyship, from being extremely agreeable, rather odd, and particularly well versed in the popular topics of ordinary conversation, contrived to keep her head above water, and be as gay and as lively as her more wealthy associates ; still managing to make an allowance to her son to the full extent permitted by his captain, and by him considered adequate to the wants and wishes of a Marquess's grandson located in the midshipmen's berth of one of his Majesty's frigates.

But days wore on, and George Augustus Frederick grew up to manhood ; his time as midshipman was served, and he had passed his examination, when another term of service as flag-lieutenant to a distant connection in India was entered upon and concluded, with promotion to the rank of commander, and the enjoyment of the moderate half-pay of seven shillings and sixpence per diem, without a chance of further employment. And thus, at the age of five-and-twenty, poor George Augustus Frederick had reached what to him was likely to be the head of his profession, and found himself again at home, and on land, without any earthly pursuit. Still, however, warmly attached to his lady-mother, he could not but feel satisfied that the pittance of income which he derived from his commission rendered a regular drain upon her slender funds unnecessary ; and, anxious as she was to enjoy as much of his society as he could spare her, he generally passed the intervals of his engagements at her hotel.

But Lady Frances, delicate when young, and unused in

childhood or youth to much exertion, became every season more and more sensible of the inconveniences of her position in society. The constant round of parties, to her who had no daughter to bring out, and no point to carry, injured her constitution, and (which people say was still more important to her ladyship) her complexion ; and she suddenly resolved to withdraw herself from the fitful, feverish life which she had so long been leading, and settle herself, for at least eight months in the year, in some quiet retirement at a distance from London, where her health might be recruited by the salubrity of the air, and her expenses contracted by the cheapness of living ; and having hit upon this prudent design, she imparted to her darling son the intention she had formed, and the project she had originated.

To him the arrangement was particularly agreeable ; for although no man of worldly feelings ever permits his ears to be open to the passing observations upon his nearest relations, or allows his eyes to see the sneers and shrugs which sometimes are exhibited upon the arrival or departure of an excellent and exemplary parent, George could not be so deaf or so blind, try earnestly as he might, as not to perceive that Lady Frances, a widow in her fifty-fifth year, was a totally different object in society from Lady Frances, a maiden of eighteen, or a wife of twenty-three.

All the little playfulness of expression, the downcast eye — the flushing cheek — the palpitating heart — the lips — the smiles — the looks themselves were there ; and such is the slow and minute progression of the ravages of time, that, in the constant appeal of beauty to her looking glass, their effects are not perceptible ; and as Gay, or, perhaps, his sarcastic assistant, Swift, tells us of the “ mother’s daughter ” —

“ Each time she looks she ’s fonder grown,
Thinks every charm grown stronger ;
But, alas ! vain maid, all eyes but your own
Can see you are not younger.”

The country, however, was the thing ; and the moment her ladyship had possessed herself of this desire of rurality, every maxim of her town-spent life was exploded ; her

taste was now all for green fields and trees, and shade and flowers. A dairy was her delight; a farm-yard her hobby; daisy-picking and violet-plucking the only pursuits she really loved; and when she recollects the many happy hours she had spent in her dear father's time at Grimsberry Castle, Cumberland, in her sainted mother's conservatory, and the American parterre, her anxiety to be fixed in a cottage and a garden became romantically ungovernable.

To satisfy this predominating passion, and put into execution her scheme of retirement, Lady Frances gave up all visits, all calls, all notes, and all messages, and drove incessantly and continuously, day after day, her attenuated job horses from Christie's to Squibb's, from Squibb's to Robins's, from Robins's to Winstanley's, from Winstanley's to Phillips's, and from Phillips's to Christie's again, in search of a villa; and many were the journeys her ladyship took, and many the disappointments she met with. The old joke of the hanging wood was nothing to the sufferings she underwent; and in one instance, when she had travelled thirty miles to look at a cottage which was described as having two views of the Thames, she found her hopes blighted, by discovering that the only method of seeing that beautiful river twice on the property was by looking out of the garret-windows, when it was just visible at high water, and looking down into the cellars, in which it regularly made its appearance at every spring-tide.

At length, however, such a "particulars" was put into her ladyship's hands by one of the most fashionable auctioneers, that there could be no doubt or hesitation as to a drive down to see the place. The only thing against it was its name; but *that*, with female readiness, her ladyship thought might be changed. It was called Slug Grove — but then there were serpentine walks and sloping lawns, towering oaks and graceful willows drooping into crystal lakes; an elegant saloon opening into a conservatory, with every requisite office and outbuilding; thirty acres of land immediately round the house, and a pew in the church — all capable of great improvement.

With all due respect for the auctioneer's modest merits, this last particular was assuredly the most correct: the

serpentine walks were mere wriggles ; the sloping lawns, slippery beds of swamp ; the drooping willows, stumpy objects, with no more curl in their branches than is to be found in a dancing-girl's hair at four o'clock in the morning ; the crystal lake was a duck pond covered with weeds like green crown-pieces ; and the conservatory, into which drawing-room (paper damp and ceiling cracked), sixteen feet by fourteen, opened, turned out to be a glassless greenhouse, in which grew a plentiful crop of nettles and marshmallows. The offices were in the last state of dilapidation ; the kitchen-chimney had fallen down, and a wandering hen had established her nest in the oven ; and as to the pew in the church, it was located in the gallery immediately over the pulpit, the sounding-board of which excluded not only its tenants from the sight of the preacher, but from the possibility of hearing his voice ; while the thirty acres of land consisted of marsh, bog, and clay, agreeably and plentifully stocked with thistles, chickweed, and dandelion.

The house had once been white, but the tear-like drippings from its various windows had, during the several years of its unoccupancy, left deep green marks upon the walls ; and a sort of verandah, which had once adorned its front towards the road, after having become filthily dirty, had fallen through, and left the canvass, which once formed its alternated black and green covering, dangling in ribands amongst its trellage columns.

" This is not comfortable, George," said her ladyship. " I am dying for a cottage ; but this is more humble than even I desire. The slopes are slops, and the crystal lake looks like a pool at commerce filled with green counters."

" Yes," said George, " playing with leaves for lives."

" La, ma'am," said the gardener, who was showing the premises, " that there weedy stuff is of no signification at all as it were ; a little patience and half-a-dozen ducks would get rid of all that in a fortnight."

" Ducks, sir," said Lady Frances. " Ducks on a crystal lake — what an idea !"

The man, who saw that Slug Grove did not exactly correspond with her ladyship's notions of comfort or the picturesque, caught up George, who was in an under-tone

expressing to his mother his conviction that the place "would not do;" and, anxious to be of use to the house-hunters, suggested that there were two or three other villas in the neighbourhood to be let.

"There is Belvidere, ma'am," said the gardener; "a very nice retired place, right opposite the limekilns, as you turn down to the Duke's Head, near the turnpike: and then there is Belle-Vue, built to match it, on the other side, the front windows of which overlook Squire Harbottle's stables and kennels; besides which it has a great convenience in hearing his honour's house-clock, which strikes every hour, chimes the quarters, and plays Rule Britannia and the Hundredth Psalm tune two hundred and fifty times in the four and twenty hours."

"And who is Squire Harbottle?" said George.

"A gentleman of large fortune, sir," said the gardener; "who seems never to know how to spend money enough: he buys every thing he can lay his hands on, right and left. He keeps the hounds here, and has his house full of company from year's end to year's end: he shoots a good deal, and drinks a good deal more than he shoots, sir; but he's uncommon affable."

"Is he married?" said George, who had at sea known a namesake, but, as it turned out, not a relation of his.

"Yes, sir," replied the man, "and has got as handsome a lady for a wife as ever trod shoe-leather; the kindest, sweetest cretur as ever breathed. They say the Squire is rather too rough in his ways, and too boisterous-like for her, for she's as gentle and as quiet as a lamb."

"Is there any other place to let," said Lady Frances, who took no great interest in the praises of 'the Squire's lady, "besides this Belvidere and Belle-Vue which you talk of?"

"Yes, ma'am," said the man, "there's Dale Cottage; but I don't think that would suit such gentlefolks as you. It's all thatched, with casement windows, and covered over with nasty ivy, and buried in trees: my master, which owned this property, hated trees; down he had them smack, smooth. 'None a your great, great long helms, and hashes, and hoaks, for me,' he used to say, 'a sucking up the

nourishment, and robbing the ground as is under 'em ;' and to be sure there is no counting for taste ; but, as I says sometimes to my old missus, I do think trees is the greatest eyesores in the country as can possible be."

" I should like to see Dale Cottage," said George, who having in his disposition an inherent turn for the conviviality of such men as Squire Harbottle, and an equally amiable turn for the society of such women as the Squire's lady, began to fancy that he should less object to a domiciliation at Binford than it before struck him he should.

And accordingly to Dale Cottage they went ; Snaith, so was the tree-hater called, leading them across the slippery slopes by the side of the weedy pond, and by the quagmire near the gate, through part of the village, to the object of their inquiries. It burst upon the sight of the visitors in its most picturesque point of view. Screened from the road, and commanding a lovely prospect, it seemed to offer quiet and repose, and to promise the realisation of Moore's beautiful anticipation, who says, or rather sings, —

" I said if there's peace to be found in the world,
A heart that is humble might hope for it here."

It was one of the prettiest things imaginable : its interior was a perfect snuggerie ; taste and judgment had combined in its decoration ; and, although here and there the envious damp had left its mark in some of the corners and crannies of its well-proportioned living-rooms, it was altogether the very thing Lady Frances wanted, and the very thing George liked ; and, accordingly, after a very brief debate, the resolution final was arrived at, that there they would set themselves down ; and, in pursuance of this determination, after having opened the preliminaries with the resident referee, they were shown over the gardens and grounds, visited all the rooms, ascertained what they should do still more to improve it, and furthermore engaged the requisite workmen to put every thing in order for the reception of furniture and themselves in a fortnight, at the latest, from the day of first visiting it.

From the gentleman with whom George had to negotiate the affair, he derived much information as to the state

of the little world at Binford, in which, as in all the small country towns and large villages of England, the good and bad passions of mankind were all at work, and where the charitable feelings and evil desires, the subtle designs and little jealousies of human nature were in as high a state of perfection as in the more important and elevated circles of society.

It appeared, upon investigation, that Binford possessed two very attractive qualities to persons of small fortune and delicate health: it had the reputation of salubrity and cheapness, and the consequence was that it was thickly populated with ladies, who, if not of equal rank with Lady Frances, possessed nearly a similar income, the result of which commixture of matured widows and matronly virgins was the constant irritation of the whole neighbourhood upon the slightest provocation.

Then, besides these foreigners to the land, and emigrants from other places, there were the regular inhabitants, who appeared to emulate the little jealousies of the exclusive coterie, and lived in the most unremitting hostility towards each other, gilding their countenances with smiles, and rather exhibiting, by a worrying course of civility of conduct than by any open declarations, the envy, and jealousy, and uncharitableness so generally prevalent in such communities.

Who that drives through Binford, and sees the elaborated smartness of Mr. Bunce's best drawing-room window curtains, and the dazzling brightness of his brazen knocker, can doubt that the graceful folds of the one, and the laboured splendour of the other, are invented and contrived to place the attorney's house and appurtenances far before that of Mr. Popjoy the apothecary, &c.; or who that beholds the *pernickety* neatness of the pebbly pavement in front of Miss Whalebone's retreat from the world, can hesitate to believe that its niceness and prettiness are destined to excite the envious admiration of Mr. Bookman, master of the "Binford Classical and Commercial Academy," and furnish conversation for her opposite neighbour, Mr. Pugh, the churchwarden?

The rector, whose name was Lovell, it seemed was a

widower, the father of an only daughter, the pride and darling of his heart, the prop of his house, the comfort of his declining years. She was fair, gentle, mild, and unassuming, highly accomplished, but extremely reserved ; distant and cold to strangers, but with a disposition affectionate, and a mind pure and unspotted as the driven snow.

From the contending influences and interests which agitated his flock, Lovell had always contrived to keep himself surprisingly free ; and, considering the character and principles of the *seigneur du village*, it must be admitted that he deserved no small credit for his neutrality.

Mr. Harbottle was a curious specimen of the almost extinct race of country squires. A swaggering, boisterous, bragging, drinking fellow ; hard headed, hard hearted, passionate, egotistical, self-opiniated, vain to an incalculable degree of every thing he himself possessed, and of the means which he had of accumulating the finest and most expensive articles of use or ornament ; but vainer than of every thing else he had, was he of his wife, of whom we need only repeat the gardener's unsophisticated eulogium, to describe her to perfection. "She was as handsome a lady as ever trod shoe-leather ; the kindest, sweetest cretur as ever breathed."

The association of this couple was strange ; but she humoured his eccentricities with so much good taste, seemed to be stone-blind to his faults, which glared upon every body else, and gave him so much credit for good-nature which he did not possess, that she contrived to make the constantly-varying visitors at their house believe that she was as happy with him as she deserved to be. With those who knew them better, this amiable game was very difficult to play.

His habits and pursuits linked him more with his immediate dependents in the adjoining town than to his more suitable companions in the surrounding country ; and accordingly the whole presentable population of Binford were kept in a perpetual agitation from the excitement produced by the frequent, almost unremitting, invitations to the Hall, where festivity and hilarity were the order of the day and night.

The only person with whom Mrs. Harbottle from choice associated was Miss Lovell; she was frequently, indeed almost constantly, her companion during the mornings. The habits and pursuits of her reverend father led him to enjoy a quieter life than that which he could have lived in Harbottle's society, and therefore his visits to the Squire's dinners were "few and far between." Emma Lovell, consequently, was seldom seen in the evening circle at her friend's; — that they *were* friends, events which have occurred since the period now spoken of, will amply prove.

The brief history of the state of affairs at Binford which is here given, in order to put the reader a little into the secret, George Sheringham received at the hands of Mr. Bunce, the attorney-at-law, with whom he had to talk over the arrangements for renting Dale Cottage; and if Mr. Bunce were somewhat more verbose in his descriptions, and rather more explicit in his illustrations, the reader has the pith of his narrative, which, as he probably is not (as George and Mr. Bunce were, during the detail) sitting after dinner, sipping his wine, may equally well suffice for the purpose, with a more protracted and elaborated detail of parish matters.

CHAPTER II.

"The claims of the 'country' are paramount."

PARL. SPEECHES.

"MERCY on us, how time flies!" said Lady Frances Sheringham to her son George. "Three weeks have passed since we first saw Dale Cottage, and those odious painters and paper hangers are still there. My patience is nearly exhausted. Here is June, and we still in London!"

"My dear mother," said George, "to you, who till this very year have been in the habit of considering the June of nature the January of fashion, and have valued

the opening beauties of spring only as they gave the signal for opening the houses of your friends, this little delay cannot be so very irksome: another fortnight, and we shall be located in our new residence."

"And do tell me, dear," said her ladyship, "that Mrs. Harbottle — is she a person to like? Shall I like her — will she suit *me*?"

"That I cannot pretend to say," replied her son, (who, it may be as well to observe, had just returned to his mother in London, from a second visit to Dale Cottage, which he had paid to it alone, in order by his presence to stimulate the different workmen in their labours,) "but I think I never saw a more charming person. The man is a monster, without one redeeming quality that I could discover in a seven hours' sitting."

"Ah," said Lady Frances, "upon that point I must beg leave to judge for myself: it very often happens that, where so large a portion of admiration is claimed by a lady, there is proportionably less left for her husband. They were civil and hospitable, and all that?"

"Oh!" said George, "if men could eat *entrées* of gold, or drink magnums of liquid silver, so much the greater the pleasure to Mr. Harbottle in feeding them; but there is a coarseness, a roughness, a something about him, repugnant to my feelings, and which seem quite to subdue and overcome his wife."

"Ah, I see," replied her ladyship, "you have arrived at the point of commiserating the sufferings of a woman, who, I have no doubt, is as happy as a princess; and, having once taken that course, the chances are, that your hatred of *him* will turn into some marvellously foolish affection for *her*."

"No," said George, "that is not likely; as far as that sort of thing goes, Mrs. Harbottle seems to be provided already with a commiserating friend; but there was a Miss Lovell, who went away after luncheon to dine, as she told me, with her sick father, the rector, of whom my loquacious friend, Mr. Bunce, did most assuredly not say half enough. She is lovely — absolutely lovely; but if she

were modelled in alabaster, or chiselled in marble, her beauty could not well be colder than it is at present."

"*Mauvaise-honte*, George," said Lady Frances, "the mere awkwardness of rusticity. I never give credit to those icicles for any thing but shiness, and a notion that it looks fine to be prudish, and well-bred to be disagreeable. However, I think by your account that we shall have plenty of specimens to select from; and, as of course Dale Cottage will give the *ton*, we may pick and choose as we like."

"I fear that Dale Cottage will never be more than secondary at Binford," said George; "the unbounded wealth of Harbottle, and the unlimited circulation of it, the daily recurrence of feasts — actual feasts — and all the other attractions of the Hall, will naturally overcome our otherwise undoubted claims to precedence."

"Oh!" exclaimed her ladyship, "I have no intention of making a struggle against the aristocracy of wealth; I shall trust to the good sense and good feelings of my neighbours to put me at my ease; and I think, with a little display of ingenuity, and a knowledge of how things *should* be done, we may contrive to rally round us some of the best amongst them, and give them such a reception as they are not quite used to in their somewhat obscure village."

"Let us begin," said George, "with treating our future home with greater respect. Nobody believes the place in which he is himself a resident obscure. You may rely upon it, the helpless missionary at Fernando Po, or the isolated resident of the Seychelles, thinks, 'to himself,' that the spot he inhabits is a place of the greatest importance to the whole world, and that the eyes of all Europe, at least, are upon him."

"That may be quite true," answered her ladyship, "but I imagine the Binfordites will have no objection to a little refinement of their style; and when one considers with what very small means good taste and judgment may contrive very agreeable things, I think I may flatter myself that the little re-unions at Dale Cottage will not be altogether neglected for the more profuse displays of Mr. Harbottle's mansion."

Thus it will be seen, that Lady Frances, driven by

circumstances from being a follower of the great world, had already pre-determined to become the leader of a little one, and, preferring to reign in Binford rather than serve in London, had begun to anticipate gaieties of her own in the country as ill suited to her income, as the enjoyment of gaieties provided by others in town were to her constitution.

George said nothing at the time to dissuade his lively parent from the course she seemed to have chalked out for herself ; for, to tell the truth, his mind and thoughts connected with a residence at Binford were fixed upon other objects than "economical" suppers, or "judicious" breakfasts. He had seen enough of Emma Lovell, in the morning visit he had paid to the Hall, to assure himself that time and a continued association with such a person were very likely to entangle him, and, if matters went on favourably, fix him for life.

This love at first sight has often been a subject of ridicule amongst slow-going people ; but, nevertheless, it has frequently turned out to be both serious and lasting. There is a sympathy between minds and persons, which in all cases, even of common intercourse, speedily attaches certain individuals to each other, who neither attract nor are attracted by certain others. It is an old remark, that no man ever looked on at a game of chance or skill, played by two people, both previously unknown to him, without, in less than five minutes, feeling an interest for the success of one of them over the other ; and there certainly are some undefinable points of accordance, some harmonies of thought or expression, of which we are not ourselves clearly conscious, but which almost immediately attract the attention, and fix our thoughts upon the individual, who, as unconsciously as ourselves, happens to possess them.

George Augustus Frederick Sheringham had flirted and made the *aimable* in every quarter of the globe. The blondes of the Baltic, the brunettes of the Mediterranean, the bulbous beauties of the Cape, and the fair yam-stocks of St. Helena, had all in their turn received his attentions, and even reciprocated his smiles ; but there was something about Miss Lovell which had the power of utterly chang-

ing the character of his admiration. With all the other women he had seen, he could laugh, and flirt, and talk ; and when the laughing, and flirting, and talking were over, he could take his hat and go ; and the next day, in some other place, repeat a similar routine of entertainment with some other beauty, and yet his heart be safe as if “ twice cased in steel.” Emma Lovell he had seen only once, but the effect of their meeting upon him had been very different from those produced during his previous butterfly course of flower-sipping. Day by day, and hour by hour, he felt that longing, wearying, sickening pain of anxious hope to see her again, which those alone can appreciate who have endured it ; and the weeks seemed lengthened into years, and the days to weeks, until the final announcement of the chief artificer at Dale Cottage gave them notice that Dale Cottage was ready for the upholsterers and furnishers.

No sooner did Lady Frances receive this happy announcement than she proceeded to order from Gillows, and Morel, and all the fashionable handcraftsmen, each of his sort, the most elegant furniture best suited to the style of her new residence ; and, in the outset of her economical retirement, incurred a load of debt, which her ladyship's gross income, superadded to her gallant son's half-pay, would not, if specially reserved for that purpose, liquidate under four or five years. But then she had such excellent judgment in these matters, and knew so well what should be done — and then the daughter of the second, and sister of the third Marquess of Pevensey, could not submit to be pitied by Mr. and Mrs. Harbottle ; and, therefore, despairing of coming into Binford upon an equality with those plebeians, as far as money went, her ladyship determined to take the lead in *her* line, and submit to the quiet and respectable population of that peaceable, but much-neglected village, what her ladyship was certain would be for *her* a triumphant comparison between the magnificence of wealth and the magnificence of good taste.

It was a very rural hornet's nest into which her ladyship was about to thrust her delicate hands, but hornet's nest it was ; and little did her ladyship anticipate the complicated

results of her occupancy of the cool sequestered grot, at which she arrived just at the close of the month of July, 1830.

Sheringham's first anxiety on his arrival at their "shady, blest retreat," appeared chiefly directed to securing his mother a more commodious pew in the church than that which in point of right belonged to Dale Cottage; and Lady Frances, who was an extremely well-regulated person, and a constant attendant at divine service, but who had never before perceived any symptoms of such zealous activity upon the particular subject of her accommodation when there, on the part of her son, was amazingly puzzled at finding herself left alone on the very first evening of their arrival at Binford, by her darling and dutiful George, who, in his anxiety for her convenience, had left his "fruit untasted and his wine untouched," in order to visit the rector himself, to arrange the matter; with which, in fact, he had infinitely less to do than the churchwardens, who had already evinced every disposition to behave handsomely in that respect to a lady of his mother's rank and station.

Those who recollect that the Rev. Mr. Lovell had a daughter will perhaps attribute a small portion of the filial devotion of Commander George Augustus Frederick Sheringham to an affection somewhat less instinctive; and those who have known what it is to be caught in a trap, set for another, may perhaps sympathise with our young and gallant friend in the result of his visit to the venerable pastor.

Sheringham called at the Parsonage. His heart beat as his cold hand pulled the bell at the gate; an affirmative to his inquiry (almost needless) if Mr. Lovell were at home, brought him speedily to his drawing-room door. He was announced, and the excellent rector received him with the greatest cordiality. He was alone, reading; the tea equipage was on the table; Emma was not there, the chair she had occupied, however, remained in its place. Sheringham seated himself: he would have given the world to inquire after her — to name her name even — but no, he dared not: such is the consciousness of concealed affection, that the simplest question, or the most common-place observ-

ation, which any body and every body might otherwise ask or make, if it bear upon the point of interest, upon the one treasured object of our solicitude, seems to us, from its importance to ourselves, to be too important to be made or asked.

"How beautiful the view is from this window!" said Sheringham.

"The prospect is charming," said Mr. Lovell, "and there is a serenity in the weather, and a buoyancy in the atmosphere this evening, which quite refreshes me. As an invalid, Mr. Sheringham, I feel these things with a sensibility which, in your state of health and at your time of life, must be almost incomprehensible to you."

Hereabouts a servant appeared with a tea-urn, which he placed upon the table.

"You will stay and take some tea, Mr. Sheringham," said Lovell.

It was the very thing Sheringham had been trying at. — Tea would insure a subsequent hour (or two perhaps) of Miss Lovell's society; he would see her in her home, the idol of her father, in the exercise of filial duty, the sight of which would make even her loveliness more lovely.

"I shall be too happy, sir," said Sheringham — and he forthwith surrendered his hat and gloves to the servant, who, having deposited them on a table, proceeded to remove the vacant chair which he concluded Emma had occupied, and place it "in order" against the wall.

"Let the tea be made out of the room," said Mr. Lovell to the man; and, turning to Sheringham, added, "This is very kind and neighbourly of you, Mr. Sheringham, for this is the first evening for many days that my daughter has dined from home. I felt myself so much better to-day, that I absolutely forced her to accept one out of fifty of her friend Mrs. Harbottle's invitations to dinner, and I feel extremely grateful for your society in her absence."

If Lovell could have seen the expression of his visiter's countenance at this announcement, his gratitude might have undergone some qualification; luckily it was getting dark, and Lovell, moreover, was somewhat weak-sighted; but

never was man so caught as Sheringham. All that his reverend friend talked, after this disclosure, seemed to his inattentive ear mere gibberish ; and the knowledge which he obtained from an observation made by Lovell to the servant, that Miss Lovell would not return from the Hall till half-past eleven, which entirely precluded the possibility of his waiting for her appearance at home, so completely upset him, that when he did, about ten o'clock, get away, he left upon Mr. Lovell's mind a most unfavourable impression as to his intellectual powers and conversational qualities.

What on earth could be more distressing ? And then, when he got to Dale Cottage, to undergo the natural reproaches of his mother, for his abrupt and undutiful desertion of her ! Her ladyship, however, whose mind was still very much alive to all the conduct of *les affaires de cœur*, was so extremely amused by the detail of her son's discomfiture, which he could not resist giving her, that the rest of the evening hung less heavily ; and before midnight, the anxious young commander retired to rest, comparatively happy in the consciousness of being in the same village with Emma, and with the certainty of " falling in with her," as he would nautically have phrased it, on the following day.

CHAPTER III.

" Hail to thee, worthy Timon ; and to all
That of his bounties taste. — The five best senses
Acknowledge thee their patron ; and come freely
To gratulate thy plenteous bosom ; the ear,
Taste, touch, smell, all pleased from thy table rise,
They only now come, but to feast thine eyes." SHAKSPEARE.

BEFORE the next noon had arrived, numerous indeed were the visitors to Dale Cottage. All the coterie, the exclusives of the Paragon, had deposited their tickets ; and Harbottle, who accompanied his lovely wife on her visit, insisted upon

it that Lady Frances should dine at the Hall, and begin their acquaintance, as he hoped they should maintain it, without ceremony.

Her ladyship accepted the bidding, because it was almost impossible, without rudeness, to decline it; but, however much policy might induce her to keep up an acquaintance with the Squire and his lady, Mr. Harbottle's manners and style of conversation were exactly the reverse of her ladyship's notions of the agreeable. It is said that women love by contraries — that a fair woman admires a dark man, that a short woman admires a tall man, and so on ; but, however opposite Mr. Harbottle might be in all his inclinations and attributes to Lady Frances, it did not seem probable that the mere force of contrast would in *their* case generate any thing like affection between them.

The first wound which the hard-hearted Squire inflicted upon Lady Frances, was in the shape of a note which arrived about four o'clock from Mrs. Harbottle, dictated by her husband, or rather written in his name, offering to send one of his carriages for her ladyship, to take her to dinner. At Windsor such things are not rare, and a royal coach may be often seen trotting about the town, just before seven, picking up dowagers and their daughters at their lodgings to carry them to the Castle ; but for Mr. Harbottle to make this sort of offer, while Lady Frances had her carriage in her coach-house, and while post-horses were to be hired at the Duke's Head, struck Lady Frances as something particularly presumptuous and impertinent. However, she shrugged up her shoulders, and, throwing an expression of patient suffering into her fine countenance, sent a verbal message of thanks, and an announcement that she would be ready at the appointed time.

Alas ! poor Lady Frances knew not the extent of the unintentional affront which had been offered to her dignity. At the hour named, the carriage came ; and when George Augustus Frederick and his mother approached it, they found already in it, two of the dowagers of the coterie, and Miss Lovell, who had been previously picked

up by the amateur omnibus of Binford. All her ladyship said, when she beheld the crowd of strangers, was, “ Well ! ” — but it was uttered in a tone so movingly pathetic, that her son, who had anticipated the many “ rubs ” his mother would meet with, from the sharp corners of Mr. Harbottle’s angular mind, could scarcely refrain from laughing. As for himself, he quietly disposed himself on the coach-box, satisfied that if for a few minutes he might be doomed to be the companion of the coachman, his neighbour at dinner would be that sweetest of all living girls, the Parson’s Daughter, who sat within the carriage, amidst the painted dowagers, pale and placid, like a virgin lily in the middle of a bunch of peonies.

The drive was not a long one : a few minutes brought them to the gates, and subsequently to the door of Binford Hall.

The ladies descended from the carriage, and crossed the hall to the drawing-room, which faces the door. By a new *gaucherie* of the marshalled servants, Miss Oliphant was announced before Lady Frances, and being “ first named in the commission,” walked into the room before her ; a circumstance which Lady Frances resolved at the moment never so far to forgive, as to invite Miss O. to Dale Cottage upon any of the occasions when the *élite* of the village were summoned.

“ Lady Frances, I’m glad to see you,” said Harbottle. “ Much squeezed, eh ? — comfortable carriage, isn’t it ? — Hobson’s build — five hundred and twenty guineas — all snug and comfortable ; a few pounds one way or another, you know, make no difference to me. How are you, Sheringham, how d’ ye do ? You came on the box — easy, eh — comfortable as a couch — had springs on purpose — not above ten pounds extra — what o’ that — as I say, comfort’s comfort. What object’s money — eh, ma’am ? ”

The last exclamation was addressed to Mrs. Eaglesfield, another of the dowagers, who existed upon two hundred a year in the smallest possible cottage.

“ I say, Sheringham,” said Harbottle, in an under tone, “ don’t you think that’s a pretty hat my wife has got on ? — French : I think it very becoming.”

Sheringham, whose skill in millinery was not very profound, said something about Mrs. Harbottle's making any hat look well.

"Five naps in Paris," said Harbottle; "paid for it myself — made her a present unawares. She's not looking well to-day — hot weather — eh? — Do you know Charles Harvey?"

"I had the pleasure of being presented to him the last day I was here," said Sheringham.

"Capital fellow!" continued Harbottle.— "Harvey, you must be very intimate friends with Mr. Sheringham. I'm sure you'll hit it off amazingly well. What do you think of the chesnut?"

"Capital hack," said Harvey.

"How long is it till dinner?" said Harbottle, casting his eye on a French clock, superbly mounted, and supported by the graces. "I should like to show Sheringham the chesnut — is that clock right?"

"Those clocks very seldom are," said Sheringham, who did not exactly know what he was saying, inasmuch as his eyes were fixed upon a much more striking object than a clock during the conversation.

"Never go right!" said Harbottle; "Ha! ha! ha! why that's a chronometer — a splendid going clock. I stand none of their nonsense; a few naps one way or the other make no difference to me. I ordered the fellow to put in good works, just such as Breguer would not serve the English navy with. So he did. Then as to the mounting of it — why, in all the other clocks of that pattern that I've ever seen, there are only three graces, so when the clock stands on the table, you see but one grace at a time. I ordered the fellow to clap me on a dozen. There they are, you see; so now, whichever way you look at it, there you see three graces at once. Ha! ha! ha! Harvey, ring the bell, there's a good fellow."

Harvey was a remarkably agreeable person, with a fine intelligent countenance, and a most agreeable manner, and the smile that played over his features, while he implicitly obeyed the mandate of his opulent and imperious host, was not lost upon Sheringham; nor did the look which

succeeded that smile, and which was directed to his opulent host's lady, less escape his observation. They passed over his features as rapidly as the shadow of a cloud flits over the green sward on a bright and breezy day; but they made Sheringham think that there was another *belle* in the house, besides the one he had been ordered to ring, over whom he had some sort of influence.

"How long is it to dinner, sir?" said Harbottle to a servant who entered the room.

"The second bell will ring in about five minutes," said the man.

"Five minutes," cried Harbottle: "come, Sheringham, come along; we can look at the horses before they dish up — plenty of time — come along."

To his dispraise it must be said, but true it is, Sheringham had not that taste for horses which many very excellent gentlemen have — perhaps his nautical pursuits and amphibious life militated against his sporting propensities; for if truth be to be told, nothing could be more unamusing to him than poking about a hot stable and looking at the tails and hinder legs of half a score animals, in which he could never have any personal interest, compelled, perhaps, by the assiduous attentions of their master to look at the beautiful pasterns of a decided kicker, or go up and test the crest of a confirmed biter — but the die was cast, and out went Sheringham.

"Jenkinson," holloa'd Harbottle, as he entered the court-yard; "where's Jenkinson?"

"He is in the house, sir," said a helper, who was cleaning harness.

"What the devil is he doing in the house, sir?"

"Helping to wait at dinner, sir," was the reply.

"Where's Watts?"

"Don't know, sir."

"And Hopkins?"

"Can't say, sir."

"Have you got a key of the hack stable?"

"Yes, sir."

Sheringham's heart sank at the affirmative — at this moment the second bell rang.

"Here, boy," cried Harbottle, "bring out the chesnut Mr. Harvey rode to-day;" — the boy proceeded to obey orders: — "have you," continued Harbottle, addressing Sheringham, "ever seen my wife's town chariot?"

"No," said Sheringham.

"Here, boy — never mind the chesnut — run and ask Jenkinson for the key of the coach-house."

Away ran the helper, at the bidding of our Timon.

"You *must* just look at that carriage — Hobson again: — he's always my man — but while he is gone, just let us look at the chesnut in the stall."

And into the stable they went — and then began a discourse about feet, and shoulders, and shape, and make, which lasted till the boy came, not with the key, but with Jenkinson himself, who appeared suffused with all the heat of exercise and exertion, to state that dinner was served up, and that he believed the company were only waiting his master's appearance in the drawing-room.

"Oh! well, we must go then," said Harbottle. "I'll show you the chariot to-morrow: come along — why, how time flies — I can't stop that, — eh, Sheringham? — Ha! ha! ha!"

As they proceeded towards the drawing-room, they were met by several servants, and Harbottle hustled forward, and of course took out Lady Frances: there were two or three of his hunting friends of the party, who, without regard to precedence, or "the order of going," had appropriated each to himself a lady to lead to dinner; and Sheringham, although placed next Mrs. Harbottle at table, missed the opportunity he had so anxiously looked forward to, of having on his other hand the gentle Emma, who, in order to complete the series of mishaps which had befallen him, was placed at the same side of the table, so that he was deprived of the only happiness which could have been left for him — that of gazing upon her beauties. Indeed, it is a question quite worthy of consideration in a discussion of such matters, whether, in *his* state of acquaintance with Miss Lovell, his advantage would not have been greater as her *vis-à-vis*, than as her next neighbour. There is much to be said on both sides;

but as far as Sheringham was personally concerned, he certainly would have preferred being, as he would have professionally called it, "alongside the Hooker."

If Sheringham, however, lost much by his separation from Emma Lovell, he gained a vast deal by his proximity to Mrs. Harbottle — she was lovely — accomplished — full of taste and feeling, enthusiastic in her admiration of talent, and perfectly qualified to appreciate it — at times animated and volatile, and gay even to wildness, but then "ever and anon" there came suddenly over her countenance, and surely over her mind (of which her countenance was the lovely index), a sudden gloom, which no effort of hers could either check or conceal — the bright blue eyes, which a minute before had sparkled with mirth and joyousness, were dimmed with a tear, as if a sudden consciousness had struck her that for a moment she had been too happy.

Above all things there appeared — if not to the superficial observer, to those who, like Sheringham, looked deeper — in the midst of her mirth a nervous anxiety while her husband was present, which those who only saw his vacant countenance and heard his ostentatious conversation, could scarcely comprehend — *she* knew him better — his paroxysms of rage were sometimes violent; and the coarse unfeeling observations in which, late in the evening, he was occasionally in the habit of indulging at her expense, mingled as they were with fulsome compliments to her personal attractions, kept her in a state of constant agitation, which it was her equally constant endeavour to conceal.

Why had she married him? — the answer is to be found in his wealth, and the influence wealth gives — her own choice was never consulted; and a nearly bankrupt father, unable to withstand the offer of an alliance by which his credit was to be saved and his character supported, had forced her into an union with a being in no one point assimilating with herself. Yet *that* was done — and nothing could be more exemplary than the conduct of Mrs. Harbottle; although, with the strangest contrariety of character, Harbottle, after descanting on her beauty, after going to all imaginable expenses for ornaments wherewith to decorate her charms, was the first to reproach her, on the

slightest appearance of gaiety or liveliness of conduct, with a desire to attract and captivate others, and a diminution of affection towards him.

This disposition, brought into action from the excitement produced by two or three bottles of wine, which he was in the daily habit of swallowing, was what she had to battle with ; and her greatest anxiety in the management of her bear, was that he should dance amiably before company ; an anxiety, however, which was not always crowned with the most perfect success.

The dinner, which of course exhibited luxury in every possible shape, passed off as dinners generally do ; and Mrs. Harbottle having exchanged looks with Lady Frances, and having heard that significant noise from her ladyship's lips, which one of my fair—my fairest—friends, once described to me as something between a negative and an affirmative, difficult to be explained, but easily to be understood, gave, or rather repeated, the signal for moving ; and the ladies retired, nothing having occurred during the whole of the banquet worthy of mention or memorandum.

Sheringham, active and gallant, stood door in hand as the fair procession quitted the dining-room ; and having lingered in vain in the hope of one glance, however transient, from Emma, was returning to his seat, when Harbottle cried out suddenly,—

“ Sheringham, stop—stop just where you are for one moment ; look at that sideboard—the light falls just right upon it ; did you ever see so handsome a sideboard as that ? That cost me five hundred and seventy guineas. Morel made it for George the Fourth, but they split about the price.”

“ It is extremely handsome,” said Sheringham.

“ You may say *that*, Master Captain,” exultingly replied the host, turning from the contemplation of the costly piece of furniture, with an expression of countenance which seemed to say, *now I have done it.*

And then he proceeded to expatiate upon the absurdity of economy, and the nonsense of caring for twenty pounds one way or another ; from which he glanced to his kennel and his dogs, which were the finest in England, let the

others be where they might ; and then his hunters, and his hacks, and so on through every branch of his establishment, moistening his egotism most liberally with huge libations of claret, which he periodically pronounced to be “ exquisite,” “ splendid,” and “ incomparable.”

There is an indescribable sympathy in our nature which I have before endeavoured feebly I fear to describe, which brings individuals more rapidly acquainted with each other in some cases than in others. It was clear that Charles Harvey and George Sheringham were destined to be friends : in the ordinary interchanges of sentiment and opinions they mutually expressed congenial ideas and feelings upon the subjects which they cursorily discussed ; and when, after a tedious sitting and protracted imbibition, which, however obsolete elsewhere, were in full force at Binford Hall, they quitted the dinner table, either of them was satisfied that the other was a remarkably agreeable person.

In the drawing-room were the ladies—if not quite reduced to the state of the fair sleepers of the American boarding-house, so graphically described by Mrs. Trollope, at least languishing in the last stage of *ennui*. Miss Eaglefield and Miss Oliphant were not companions for Lady Frances, nor, indeed, could Mrs. Harbottle herself pretend to refer to the habits and usages of a great-grandfather, to which relation of her own Lady Frances was much accustomed to allude ; and, therefore, they sat patient listeners to the very agreeable conversation of the lady of fashion, although all she said sounded to their “ unaccustomed ears” very much like the language of a fairy tale ; and the histories which she recounted of what was actually going on in London, were delivered in a phraseology to them almost as unintelligible as the inscrutable language of Madagascar or the blasphemous absurdities of the “ unknown tongues.”

There had been music—that is to say, Emma Lovell had been playing the harp—and had been rewarded with “ very pretty, upon my word,” by Lady Frances, who did not add—“ considering”—but looked it as expressively as if she had said it. The harp stood where Emma had left it ; but before Sheringham had been able to get away

from the "sublime port and splendid claret" of his magnificent host, she that "loved to touch it" had betaken herself to her parental roof. "Again baffled!" thought George: "does she do this on purpose, or is there a fate in it?"

"Well, Lady Frances," said Harbottle, "did you think we were lost? I know with you fine folks in London wine is out of fashion,—never out of fashion with me, at least in my own house, where I know what I am drinking—pure, unadulterated wine, ma'am—import it all myself; for, as I say to Mrs. Harbottle, what can it signify, a little more expense to secure what is truly good. Of course with people of fashion and that sort of persons who live from hand to mouth, a retail wine-merchant is the only man—but not with me. This is very handsome Dresden, Lady Frances," continued he, helping himself to some coffee; "I got this a bargain. Ha! ha! ha!"

"I don't like Dresden *chaney*," said Lady Frances: "my poor grandfather had some very fine, which I believe my brother Pevensey has now; but I never had a taste for it."

"What say you to a little *écarté*?" said the master of the house. "Fanny, my dear, see if you can make up a set or two: they won't play high, Lady Frances; you need not be afraid."

"I seldom play cards," said her ladyship, who could have eaten the man alive for his kind consideration in moderating the scale of *his* play to *her* means.

"Oh, then by Jove! I'll show you the house," said Harbottle.

"Is not it late, dear?" asked his lady; who was convinced that exhibiting the interior of a modern villa, by way of sight, to a native born of Grimsberry Castle, was but a bad way of entertaining her ladyship, and hoped to divert her husband from his attentions, and save her noble visiter the trouble of mounting narrow staircases to peep into pigeon-holes, and traversing long passages to admire the arrangements of neatly papered bed-chambers and dressing-rooms.

"Late—no—what do you mean by late?" said Har-

bottle ; " you did not discover how late it was till we came to you, and all at once you find out how late it is."

" My dear Harbottle," said Harvey, " it is past twelve, and one should not begin a voyage of discovery at such an hour as this."

" Oh ! just as she likes," said Harbottle, looking extremely angry ; " have your own way—of course : if Fanny says one thing and I say another, you are the man to side with her, that's natural."

It was clear to Mrs. Harbottle that her bear had done dancing for that night, and, therefore, she felt it best to leave him to himself, just giving Harvey such a look as might induce him to adopt a similar course to that which she intended herself to follow—namely, to say nothing more.

" Well, Lady Frances," said the Squire, " I'm not to show you my house to night, that's clear ; so we will postpone it till some better opportunity."

Hereabouts entered two or three servants with trays and other implements indicative of supper—crowds of glasses congregated upon vast salvers, surrounding bottles of divers dimensions.

" George," said Lady Frances, " it is getting late, had you not better see — eh —"

" Oh, the carriage is ordered," said Harbottle : " we always send our friends home—but then all we ask is our own time—if we find the carriage, we must have the company ; and so, my lady, your ladyship must have some supper, and a drop of something hot after. I've got some rum in this room as old —ay, as old as you are, I dare say—capital stuff, four and twenty shillings a bottle. Ha ! ha ! ha !"

Rum ! old as herself ! the combination was most revolting ; and if the patterning rain against the windows had not given powerful evidence of the state of the weather, her ladyship would instantly have set out on her pilgrimage to Dale Cottage, and left the Caliban of the village to the full enjoyment of his abominable practices. Her ladyship with difficulty kept her temper, and the manner in

which she refused "any thing" was not quite so gracious as her manners generally were.

Sheringham, himself, did not at all dislike the sort of life that was opening upon him—his feelings were not so sensitive, nor were his nerves so delicate, as his mother's: he enjoyed the absurdities of Harbottle, without being personally annoyed by his *gaucherie*; and in the conversation of his new friend, Harvey, who had been speaking liberally and loudly in praise of Miss Lovell, anticipated much pleasure and amusement in a circle which, as far as he could judge, his right honourable parent was not very likely to enter more frequently than necessary.

The party, excepting Lady Frances and Mrs. Harbottle, who remained conversing with her visiter, crowded round the little well stored table; and the elderly ladies, who thought, in spite of Lady Frances's dictum against suppers, that when they were at Rome they should do as Rome does, disposed of very considerable quantities of cold fowl, tongue, jelly, cream, and other combustibles, as Mr. Harbottle, in his jocose manner, facetiously called them, and did not hesitate to qualify the varied meal with certain potations of Mr. Harbottle's own "brewing," the *fond* of which was the rum coeval with her ladyship; whose feelings were more than ever outraged, when her tormentor returned to the charge about the rum, and added, "I know the year when it was made, my lady, and I have got a peerage in the library; to-morrow I'll compare notes—that peerage is the deuce, my lady, there we *do* catch you."

"I believe the peerages are vastly incorrect as to dates," replied her ladyship.

It was not until past one, that Harbottle would hear of the departure of his visitors; then, he permitted the bell to be rung and the horses ordered; then came the bustle of preparation, and Harvey officiated in supporting Miss Oliphant, while Sheringham performed the same kind of office to Miss Eaglefield. Harbottle, himself, affecting great gravity and steadiness (scarce able to stand), gave his arm to her ladyship, who took leave of Mrs. Harbottle with mingled feelings of humanity and compassion, and was conducted to the carriage by her beau, who wound up all

his performances of the evening, and eternally sealed his doom in the estimation of his right honourable visiter, by whispering familiarly to her, as they crossed the hall,— “ I say, don’t you go and offer my servants any money for taking you home ; they have plenty of wages and plenty to eat and to drink—and I beg you wo’n’t—it’s no use having my horses out at night, if you are to pay for them.”

To describe the look Lady Frances gave the unconscious Harbottle, when he had made this request, would be impossible—the die was cast. She made him no answer—but involuntarily drawing her arm from his, she gave a slight shudder, and stept into his coach, as she resolved upon the instant, for the last time.

Sheringham followed his mother into the vehicle, the door closed, and they drove off ; Harbottle saluting them with a view halloo, which made the neighbouring dales and rocks to echo.

CHAPTER IV.

“ Ambition ! thou art like the pelican,
The parent of a numerous race of cares,
Which prey upon the breast that gives them birth”

BELLERS.

“ THAT’s a mighty agreeable gentleman we dined with yesterday,” said Lady Frances to her son, as she dropped a lump of sugar into her tea-cup at breakfast the next morning : “ why, George, he is absolutely a monster.”

“ I am inclined to think with you,” said her ladyship’s son ; “ but according to the proverb which the elderly ladies last night quoted, and which suggests doing at Rome what Rome does, I think we may as well live upon terms of civility with him, so long as we are his neighbours.”

“ Of civility, decidedly,” replied Lady Frances, “ but not of intimacy—one is civil to a footman ; but I never

yet saw any human being with whom, I am sure, I never could be intimate, till I made the acquaintance of Mr. Harbottle ; and as for his wife, why really——”

“ Oh, my dear mother ! ” interrupted Frederick, “ not a word against the wife—she is one of the most interesting specimens of patient suffering I ever beheld.”

“ I admit that there is a sort of amiable attention in her manner,” said her ladyship, “ which gives the idea of her being amazingly interested in whatever one is discussing with her ; but then there is something about her which makes her to me very unsatisfactory ; that Miss Lovell, I admit, is pretty.”

“ Beautiful ! ” exclaimed George.

“ No, not *that*, ” said Lady Frances, “ pretty is the word—a delicate skin, blue eyes, and light hair, *have* their merits ; but there again the manner is wanting—the air of a gentlewoman, she has not a notion of it—she sneaks about a room as if she were ashamed of herself, and gets out of one’s presence as if she had committed some heinous offence.”

“ Rely upon it,” said George, “ if Emma Lovell were seen and known, she would catch half the hearts in London — the reserve and coldness which strike you as *gaucherie* are to me the most attractive points about her. I hate the universal amiability of misses, who smile alike on all around — give me something to win, and something worthy to be won.”

“ Now, my dear George,” said Lady Frances, “ all I ask of you is to do me the favour not to fall in love with any thing here ; Binford is not the emporium at which I should like you to barter your heart — a little harmless flirtation with Mrs. Harbottle I do not interdict, and I dare say she will be vastly happy to enlist you as her gooseberry-picker ; but, for mercy’s sake, do not commit yourself in any serious engagement.”

“ It strikes me that my young friend, Mr. Harvey, already holds the appointment you design for me in Mrs. Harbottle’s establishment.”

“ There we differ,” said her ladyship ; “ that Mr. Harvey, if I am not mistaken, holds a place much nearer her

heart — a gooseberry picker ought neither to be so young nor so handsome as Mr. Harvey — his duty is to hover about, to watch his patroness's wants and wishes ; escort her, if she require it, to the supper-room, make way for her and secure a place for her, stay by her, until somebody comes up with whom she wishes to flirt, and then withdraw and give his place to *that* person ; to be constantly on the *qui vive*, to take off the attention of any young *protégée*, who may be rather *de trop*, and even go the length of dancing with the said *protogée*, if necessary ; to hunt out his patroness's shawls ; call up her carriage, and, if required, go out shooting or sailing with her husband (as the case may be), on the shortest notice — these and a hundred less important duties fall to the share of the gooseberry-picker ; but Mr. Harvey's manner to Mrs. Harbottle has much more of *empressement* about it than is either required or encouraged in that particular capacity."

Scarcely had her ladyship given her definition of the duties of the lady's staff-officer, when a noise of bells ringing, dogs barking, horses prancing, and wheels grinding the gravel, announced an arrival. It was Harbottle himself — who entered, followed by Lady Frances's footman, bearing a huge basket of fruit — pines, peaches, grapes, and all the other best products of his hot-houses.

" How d'ye do, my lady ? " said Harbottle : " I have brought ye some fruit, my lady — how d'ye do ? Not the worse for raking — my poor wife has got a sad headache ; I never have a head-ache, ha ! ha ! ha ! She is a delicate plant — I have had the best advice in the world for her every where — Paris, Rome, Naples, and Vienna — all one to me where I am — money is money, and I can always have my money's worth ; these are magnificent grapes, arn't they — I calculate they cost me at least five and twenty shillings a pound ; but as I say, what does it signify ? Well, George, what are you for to-day ? "

" A little quiet," said George ; " I have some letters to write, and I have promised, moreover, to call at the Parsonage."

" Oh, oh ! " said Harbottle, with a laugh that was loud and harsh enough to make the window-glass vibrate, " that's it — I know it — I saw it — I said to Mrs. H., I smelt a

rat — Emma Lovell has made a hole in George Sheringham's heart — ha ! ha ! ha !”

“ George Sheringham !” muttered Lady Frances.

“ She's a charming girl, and a good girl, but poor — not fifty pounds in the world, I believe, beyond the living, which, considering you have nothing yourself, is a bit of a drawback.”

Lady Frances felt herself turning alternately crimson and white, to think that she had so fallen from her high estate as to hear a stranger in her own house, calling her son George, discussing the merits of an alliance with Miss Lovell, and commiserating his poverty as the bar to its completion.

“ I am quite sure, Mr. Harbottle,” said her ladyship, “ that a son of mine will never inconvenience the young lady by his persecutions.”

“ Oh, she likes him amazingly,” said Harbottle: “ these women have a sort of free-masonry of their own ; and the only difference between their craft and ours is, that they see no use in a secret, if they mayn't tell it, and so she told my wife what an agreeable man she thought George, and my wife told me — ha ! ha ! ha !”

“ George, as you call him, sir,” said her ladyship, “ is, I am sure, highly flattered by the information.”

“ And uncommon lucky in securing my wife's friendship too,” interrupted Harbottle: “ you may rely upon it, though I dare say you know enough of such things without my telling you, that a female friend will contribute more to a lover's success in a month than all his own labour and pains in a year without her — that's the way I got Mrs. H.”

“ I am sure, Mr. Harbottle,” said Lady Frances, “ we are greatly indebted to you.”

“ I am, I sincerely admit,” said George.

“ You will find her up at lunch at the hall,” continued Harbottle, “ and remember, faint heart never won fair lady ; and for all she does seem so distant and reserved, when she does take a fancy, she is a most affectionate creature — ha ! ha ! ha !”

“ Is she in the habit of taking fancies ?” said Lady Frances, who devoutly wished her familiar friend at the bottom of one of his own fish-ponds.

"No, no, come hang it, Lady Frances," said Harbottle, "you are too sharp upon me — what I mean to say is, that I never in my life saw one of those quiet, silent girls — iced beauties, as Mrs. H. calls them, who, when she *did* thaw, was not the most——"

"My dear Mr. Harbottle," said George, "do talk of something else ; my mother is in an agony at the bare supposition of my acting upon your advice."

"Agony," said Harbottle ; "why, my lady, I think it would be a nice match enough — with nothing on either side, you know, they can't reproach one another, eh ? Ha ! ha ! ha !"

"Indeed, sir," said Lady Frances, drawing herself up into a graceful attitude, "these are subjects which one does not usually discuss in this manner. I have no fear that my son, with the feelings and principles which I know him to possess, will ever do any thing which will bring sorrow upon me, or discredit upon himself ; we are, however, yet such perfect strangers, that the very conversation of this morning repeated, as it may be, at luncheon, does not appear to me to be quite prudent — agreeable I am sure it is not."

"Don't be angry, Lady Frances," said Harbottle, with as much ease and familiarity as if he had known her for twenty years. "I dare say old Lovell would think twice before he let his daughter marry a man without money. I was only joking about *that* ; but I said what I will say again, that she is a charming girl."

The conversation here took a more general turn ; and the praises of Emma Lovell, which sounded, even in Harbottle's harsh voice like music to George's ears, gave place to a conversation infinitely less interesting to George, and infinitely more gratifying to his mother.

"I am going over," said Harbottle, "to the fifteenth and last day's sale at Macedoine Hall, where I have made a good many purchases ; and I declare to you, my lady, I am glad the sale is so nearly over, for I know I should go on making purchases to the end of the chapter — ha ! ha ! ha !"

"'Tis a fine place," said her ladyship : "poor dear Lord Errington, he was an agreeable person enough."

"I dare say he was, my lady," replied Harbottle: "I never had the honour of his acquaintance — he and his lady cut me and mine; so I waited."

George understood enough of this affair between the families, and, short as his acquaintance had been with Binford, had been illuminated in this particular by his friend Harvey, who had admitted to him in a *sotte voce* conversation after dinner, that Harbottle, beyond the mere pleasure of possessing divers and sundry articles belonging to the late Lord Errington, enjoyed a still greater delight in buying things out of a house for money, into which house he never had been admitted until by a five shilling catalogue to view the "effects."

"Pray," said Lady Frances, "has Lady Errington any family?"

"Three daughters," said Harbottle; "no great beauties; they all take after their father — ha! ha! ha!"

"Melancholy for themselves, poor dears, but very satisfactory to their parents," said Lady Frances; "and Lady Errington, who was *she* — I quite forget?"

"Upon my word I don't think I ever heard," said Harbottle. "It was the same as in my case, I believe, the money was all on the man's side."

"And what are you going to buy to-day, sir?" said Lady Frances.

"I really don't know," replied the Squire.

"What did you buy yesterday?" said George.

"Oh, I'll show you," said Harbottle, pulling out of his pocket a huge crumpled catalogue, collated and concocted by that prince of all auctioneers, Mr. George Robins; — "here is what I bought yesterday.

"Lot 387.—Two gold dragons with silver tails and amethyst eyes, with movable heads, for burning pastiles."

"For those I gave two hundred and forty guineas — cheap at the money. His lordship paid six hundred pounds for them at Storr and Mortimer's.

"Extraordinary bargains," said Lady Frances.

"Then," said the Squire — "Lot 594.—A gold duck (the Errington crest), with music inside, and mechanism to move it, containing four beautifully cut-glass scent bottles."

I got that," continued he, "for eighty-nine pounds — the old Countess of Bromsgrove sat opposite to me and bid up to eighty-five, but I would have had it if she had gone on till midnight, eh? Ha! ha! ha!"

"It is a useful article," said George, smilingly.

"That's not it," said Harbottle; "I did not want either the duck or the bottles; but to be beat by an old dowager countess with a jointure of not more per annum than it costs me to keep my hounds was what I could not stand — ha! ha! ha!"

Lady Frances shuddered again just perceptibly.

"Then, my lady," said Harbottle, "there was lot 2538., 47th in the thirteenth day's sale. 'A cedar bagatelle board, silver gilt clamps and bindings, lined with purple Genoa velvet on silver tripod stand, supported by gold ducks, silver balls and ivory cues, complete.' That was my last hit — got it home this morning. The silver balls wo'n't run upon the velvet, and the ivory cues split the first blow Fanny made: — but, no matter, there it is — and so I must be off for the last day — adieu, my lady. Sheringham, remember luncheon at half-past one — you know your way — and as for your ladyship, just treat us as old friends — don't stand upon ceremony with us, you'll find us always the same, old lady — no stiffness — no finery — good day — good day — ha! ha! ha!"

And so he made his exit.

"Ceremony with the Harbottles!" thought her ladyship — "old lady!" — "always the same" — "no finery" — mercy on me, what notions the people have; as if money could purchase what they most stand in need of." And after this reflection her ladyship proceeded to lecture her son upon the necessity of taking care that he neither made a fool of himself, nor was made a fool of by the Parson's Daughter. She then retired to her boudoir to write manifold sheets of sentiment to divers and sundry of her noble friends, with whom still intending to make her autumnal visitations (which she did with an archdiaconal regularity) to their various country houses she as regularly corresponded, and George proceeded on the back of his pony to Binford Hall, for the express purpose of meeting the said Parson's Daughter at luncheon.

CHAPTER V.

A murderous guilt shows not itself more soon
Than love that would seem hid. SHAKSPEARE.

THE monotony of a country life, as those who have tried it must feel, is, of all things in the world the most delightful, if that can be called monotony which, although each day's arrangement may be the same, presents a continued variety of minor incidents springing out of the general order of things.

We have just announced the first luncheon at Binford, at which were assembled the lady of the house, Miss Lovell, Mr. Harvey, and Captain Sheringham. It proved so agreeable, that an engagement was made to meet on the morrow at the same hour — from that morrow and that luncheon grew another, until, for ten or twelve days consecutively, these “creatures of habit” passed their mornings together, excepting on the two Sundays which intervened.

It was on the second Monday of this agreeable association (for the Squire was during the day actively employed in some of those invigorating sports, which do so much honour to our countrymen), that when the party broke up to dress for dinner, (for after the luncheon, came a drive; and after the return from the drive, a walk in the garden; and after *that*, the separation for the day,) Emma Lovell found herself, for the first time, too late for her father's dinner; and Mrs. Harbottle felt annoyed beyond measure, that she could not venture so far to infringe upon the authority of her lord and master, as to invite Sheringham to join their family party.

A pony phaeton was ready to take Miss Lovell home, but strange to say, although she was late, she — the distant, timid, and retiring Emma — declared a preference for walking; and, in reply to her fair friend's most reasonable statement as to the greater expedition of the carriage, de-

clared that as she *was* too late for papa, it could not be helped, and as he *must* have dined long before, a few minutes one way or the other *could* make no difference. George's arm was therefore accepted ; and Mrs. Harbottle, with Charles Harvey for *her* supporter, having chaperoned Emma to the lodges, the gallant son of Neptune (and of Lady Frances Sheringham) escorted her through the quiet village of Binford to the Parsonage, where he safely deposited his divinity at the door of the divine.

"I think," said Mrs. Harbottle as they were walking homewards, to Charles, with whom she had grown into a habit of confidence, "our new neighbour and our fair friend seem to sympathise amazingly."

"So do I," said Harvey : "how animated she has grown ! — those mild blue eyes upon which a man fancied he might look with impunity are now lighted up into a fire and brilliancy hitherto imperceptible. I suppose, like the 'snow on Jura's steep,' of which Moore so sweetly sings, the ray *has* beamed, whose touch is fire ; and your iced beauty is about to melt."

"Not into tears, I hope," said Mrs. Harbottle ? — "I know no human being for whom I have a higher regard than I have for Emma Lovell — and fervently do I hope and pray that she will think before she concludes on such a step as marriage. A momentary decision involves the happiness or misery of a whole existence. *He* seems amiable, high-spirited, and kind-hearted ; extremely well-mannered, very agreeable, and generally accomplished ; but it requires time and experience to study the character of the man who, for ever and aye, is to have the control, the guidance, and devotion of one's whole life and conduct, and with whom, at all times and all seasons, and under all circumstances, one is to be linked."

"Why, Fanny," said Charles Harvey (who sometimes went the length of calling her by her Christian name), "you have all on a sudden turned lecturer, and, as lecturers often do, preach what you do not practise — how long did you know Harbottle before you married *him*?"

"Charles, Charles," said Mrs. Harbottle, pressing the arm she leant upon, as if to check the turn the convers-

ation was taking, "do not quote *my* case as an example for any body else. I have every reason to be happy with my husband — wealth, and all indulgences that he can afford me, are at my command — but our marriage was one which, God forbid, I ever should offer as a precedent for the guidance of others. He was rich, and appeared good-humoured and lively, and was a great favourite with my father. I was a child when we married, and dutifully obeyed that father's command. I made *his* happiness, and — "

"Well," said Charles, "and — "

" — Secured my own," continued she, after a pause. "I ought to be happy, I *am* happy — but — don't misunderstand me — it is a kind of happiness which would not gratify the better regulated mind of Emma Lovell, superior as she is to *me* in every thing. All I desire is within my reach ; nothing that I express a wish for is denied me ; but as you, who live with us so much, must see and feel, there *are* times when the peculiarities of *his* temper and character create pain, and sorrow, and anxiety for me ; but he intends well and kindly, and — what I mean — and I am sure I can scarcely tell how we have been led into this strain of conversation — I — that is — in short — to Emma Lovell, such a match would be misery. She shrinks from the boisterous mirth in which *he* delights ; she is unambitious, and would, I am sure, without talking romance, prefer a cottage with the man she could really love and esteem to a palace with a being like — like — I mean a being of an uncertain character, whose pursuits were not congenial with her own, and whose temper, influenced by habit, was not to be depended upon. In short, I think — I think that — Sheringham appears to have made such an impression upon her, that if you — are anxious — not — to lose, her — you had — better be on the alert."

"I !" said Harvey, "I — I — would not — my — " He said no more ; but he felt that he would have given the world to speak : his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, his cheek flushed, and his heart beat, and they walked on ; and Fanny, not seeking to break the silence, kept her eyes upon the ground, and, with an air of gaiety

which a starting tear belied, struck up the grass with her parasol, as they passed along, by way of seeming thoughtless.

The first dinner-bell sounded as they reached the door of the house — but the silence remained unbroken. Fanny had surely disclosed more of herself and her feelings, in describing the feelings of her friend, than she had ever disclosed before to Harvey, or even intended to disclose then. He, on the other hand, had declared in brief but striking terms his total indifference towards Emma Lovell, with a devoted affection for whom Harbottle was fond of charging him.

They walked forwards to the hall-door, still without speaking ; and when they arrived there, it seemed as if their silence had been so long protracted, that any effort to get up a new conversation would be in vain. They reached the steps ; and having in a hurried manner withdrawn her arm from that of Charles, Mrs. Harbottle ran hastily into the house without uttering a syllable, or even so much as looking at her companion.

Harvey went to his room to dress for dinner, but whether on his head or his feet was to him a matter of uncertainty ; he felt as if he were in a dream, or had just awakened from one. Little had been said in his walk with Mrs. Harbottle, — but never was the eloquence of silence more powerful ; — yet what *had* happened ? After all, she had spoken only interestedly for others — she had admitted the kindness and affection of her husband ; in fact, she had expressed nothing but an anxious desire that Charles should not refer to *her*, as an example for other girls to follow, in their decisions upon matrimony.

Fanny's sensations were far different from Harvey's. With a heart and mind full of the highest principle, and imbued with the strongest feelings of the purest honour, she felt conscious that, in the confidence of friendship which she entertained for him, she had let slip, for the first time in her life to man, the secret that, with all “ appliances and means to boot,” her happiness was not complete — that in her husband she vainly sought for a companion and friend — and that, however strongly

bound by religion and duty to “love, honour, and obey” him, she hopelessly yet constantly endeavoured to attach him to herself by gentler ties than those which duty prescribes, and make him love her for qualities which she possessed, and of which, without vanity, she knew the value, but which every day’s experience convinced her *he* could not justly appreciate.

It is true that Emma Lovell knew this secret of her heart; for she was in her entire confidence; and to Emma Lovell she had often urged the merits of Charles Harvey, whose mind, and temper, and disposition, and character, she used constantly to assure her, were formed to make *her* happy; and in the frequent repetition of his praise, she was sincere and disinterested beyond suspicion: while Harvey, on the other hand, fascinated by the conversation and society of Mrs. Harbottle, saw in her only the charming companion and the amiable friend, without a thought or wish which could unpleasantly interfere with the recollection, that she was the wife of his kind yet boisterous host, whose unbounded hospitality he constantly eulogised, and whose honour he would at any hour have vindicated with his life.

Up to the period of the conversation just recorded, these had been his sentiments, these his opinions; but one of the moments which decide the fate of woman, and man too, had arrived, and his thoughts began to take a new turn. The mirror of his mind no longer reflected Harbottle as the thoughtless, rattling, open-hearted Squire; he saw him the very contrast of tenderness and gentleness; he beheld him harsh, coarse, vain of his wealth, and violent in his temper; his accomplishments he reduced to two — hard drinking and hard riding: on these he piqued himself, and by alternating his adoption of them, either drank till he grew first peevish and then passionate, or rode till he was fatigued to death, and slept away the evening on one of his crimson velvet sofas, the *beau-ideal* of a tired post-boy. Add to this, that the leading characteristics of his mind, beyond the vanity of riches, were a sweeping suspicion of female virtue, and a splendid contempt for female intellect, and Harvey could no longer hesitate in

deciding that he had all along been mistaken, and that Fanny must be, and indeed was — a miserable woman.

And so she was — but rendered less miserable by the endurance of the ills which actually surrounded her, than by her indiscreet confession of them to Charles. Her manner while dressing was so wild, and her language so incoherent, that her maid endeavoured to persuade her not to go down to dinner ; for well-trained *soubrettes* have a vast dread of those incoherences in language which temporary excitement sometimes produces ; inasmuch as they know that ladies occasionally give grounds for great suspicion or alarm, by uttering words which, in fact, have no meaning. but which, coupled with passing events by interested people, may really place them in very awkward situations. Mrs. Harbottle, however, struggled with her feelings, and came into the drawing-room before dinner, looking as lovely and as calm as if nothing beyond the ordinary events of the day had occurred.

Harvey's embarrassment was more visible : unpractised in the art of lady-killing, and wholly unskilled in the hypocrisy so essential to support the double character which he seemed most involuntarily destined to play, he felt a necessity for restraint which he had never experienced in that house before. Fanny had given him her confidence ; she had trusted more to *him* than she had ever yet trusted to man. He felt that if he sat down by her, as he was wont to do, and joked with her upon the common occurrences of the day, she might think him either devoid of sympathy in her unhappiness, or presuming upon the favour she had unquestionably shown him ; while, if he assumed a colder and more distant manner, she might fancy him ungrateful for her confidence, or, as the friend of her husband, outraged by the candour of her negative admissions.

Mrs. Harbottle saw his difficulty, and did not suffer him for a moment to hesitate as to the course he was to pursue with regard to her. She spoke to him as if nothing had been said, appeared to have forgotten all that had passed, and took upon herself to detail the proceedings of the morning to the Squire, who brought home to dine

with him two of his favourite neighbours, much in the habit of bowing the knee at his shrine, and remaining with him till two or three o'clock in the morning, in the enjoyment of what are called the pleasures of conviviality. So far all went well.

"Master Charles," said the Squire, after Mrs. Harbottle had retired from the dinner table, "the wine is with *you*; why you seem squeamish to-day — drink, man — drink; that's my own importation, stands me in twelve and six-pence a bottle; but what does that matter? — what's money made for, as I say, but to circulate? Come, fill a bumper. 'Gad, I suspect he's in love, gentlemen — upset by a pair of blue eyes. I know the secret: our Parson's Daughter here has picked up a London lover, who is going to snap her up from Charles, and he is down-hearted about it. Is not that it, Charles? Ha! ha! ha!"

To describe the horror which this appeal excited in poor Charles, whose heart was bursting — who saw the bumper proffered by the hand of his hospitable, hard-headed host, conscious as he was of the real cause of his low spirits — is impossible. He tried to smile, but the effort was vain; and he swallowed the wine, tasteless to his palate, by an almost convulsive effort.

"Poor fellow!" said Harbottle, "I pity you with all my heart; I hate crossings in love: of course, with *my* fortune, I knew none of them — plenty of girls ready to jump at *me*, and I took my choice, and married Fanny, because I liked *her*, and because the liking was mutual; and so we had no weepings and no willows, but all mirth and merriment. She cried a bit, I recollect, at starting; but the sun soon shone, and we have been as happy as the day is long ever since — ha! ha! ha!"

The turn the conversation had taken was painfully distressing to Charles, who sat listening to the praises of Fanny, and the often reiterated eulogies on her beauty, and the still oftener repeated declarations of her goodness, in a state of fever, from which he was only relieved by the starting of a new subject, and a proposition by the Squire to make up a fishing party for the morning.

"I think," said the Squire, "I can promise you a

southerly wind ; if I am wrong — for money wo'n't buy a wind, except in Lapland — we must put up with a westerly one ; and, if it happens to be cloudy, I care little, for my part, from what quarter it blows. But then we must be stirring early. Charles, you will be in your glory. Mr. Harvey is a dab at killing trout ; drake-fly, wasp-fly, or stone-fly, all one to him. I never saw a fellow handle a rod or land a fish more knowingly."

On any previous day to this, Harvey's eyes would have glistened with pleasure at the anticipation of the promised sport ; in one instant would he have responded to the call of his host, and have entered into all the arcana of the art, with an animation and precision most gratifying to the shades of Messrs. Walton and Cotton ; but to-night, the proposition (tasteless as the prospect of the diversion itself had become) involved a variety of doubts and uncertainties. He was engaged to the repetition of that day's luncheon on the morrow — his absence would perhaps annoy Mrs. Harbottle — his promise had been given. Why, then, when Harbottle, perceiving his hesitation, inquired if he had any engagement to prevent his joining them — why did he not at once say that he *was* engaged to the luncheon and subsequent drive with his wife, Emma Lovell, and George Sheringham ?

It was the consciousness — it was the self-accusation — it was the combination, in his own disturbed mind, of the simplest and most innocent of arrangements with other and more important events, which stopped his mouth. For the first time in his life, he felt a restraint upon his tongue when he attempted to speak the plain truth ; and for fear of exciting a suspicion, when there was in fact nothing to suspect, he declared himself free from all engagements, and ready to attend them.

" Well said, Charles," cried the Squire. — " Pass the wine, gentlemen. We'll send for Hallett, and tell him to get the tackle in order, and have the boat ready to take us to Swimmer's Ford, not later than five o'clock — earlier, if you please. We'll send down breakfast to the Ford, and enjoy ourselves like aldermen. — Charles, go like a good fellow into the drawing-room, and tell Fanny our scheme,

and see if she has any objection to it. I think it is always amiable to ask, though I do follow my own vagary afterwards — ha ! ha ! ha ! and I say, Charles, tell her we are coming to coffee forthwith."

Fifty times had Charles been sent on similar embassies, and had Fanny been his sister, he could not have more fraternally nor yet more affectionately fulfilled his mission. To-night, he felt as if there were something wrong, something improper, something guilty in it. He went, but hesitatingly, and when he reached the drawing-room, instead of feeling disappointed at Fanny's absence, it was the greatest relief to him to find, that (being, as one of the servants said, unwell) she had already retired to rest.

But then he must labour under the imputation of levity and heartlessness till the next day's dinner time. He had broken his engagement with Mrs. Harbottle, to join her husband in a sport, which, however agreeable, detached him entirely from the party which he himself had been most active in making up. This he could not endure. What could he do to escape the suspicion of such fickleness? — Of course, beg Harbottle to explain to his wife his anxious wish that he should go with them, and make his excuse (if, considering the terms on which they had so long lived, excuse were necessary) for not joining them at luncheon.

That he could not do. He was on the point of joining in one of the "uncongenial pursuits" of her husband, to which she had alluded, if not by words at least by implication, and he could not make *him* the medium of communication to announce this change in his resolution; a change effected in fact for *her* sake, or rather for fear of mentioning the "once familiar word" which the recollection of the unlooked for conversation of the morning had "forbidden him to speak."

Oh, mischief, mischief! how easily art thou generated! What was his resource? Whilst he was doubting — hesitating — trembling — ay, trembling — an inkstand caught his sight — paper, pens, wax, all the implements were there — a note to Fanny — a few words would ex-

plain all. How could he endure the suspicion which he knew must attach to him, of cold-heartedness, or something worse? — In less than five minutes a note was written, folded, sealed ; — but how to be delivered — this was his doubt. He opened the drawing-room door, and in the lobby, passing onwards to her mistress's room, he met Mrs. Devon, Mrs. Harbottle's maid. The coincidence was strange, but accidental ; here were the means direct.

"Devon," said Charles, feeling himself as pale as death,
"give that to your mistress."

"Yes, sir," said Devon, and passed on.

It was done — the rubicon was passed — there was nothing in the note that Harbottle and a jury of husbands might not have read, as we may presently see, but it was a note — the first he had ever found it necessary to write, the first *that* maid had ever been asked to carry.

He returned to the dining-room, was rallied by his host upon his long *tête-à-tête* with his wife, announced her premature retirement, and swallowed more wine ; to wine succeeded coffee, to coffee liqueur, to liqueur broiled bones ; to those, all sorts of potations ; and at half-past one the party separated for *the night*, to meet and begin the day at half-past four.

CHAPTER VI.

I would have some confidence with you,
That deceives you nearly. SHAKSPEARE.

"I SHOULD like to know," said Mrs. Devon, as she sat at breakfast with the house-steward, the gentlemen out of livery, the groom of the chambers and other privileged persons of the household, "the meaning of your master's sending that note last night to my lady." She addressed herself to Harvey's *valet*.

"What does it signify, Mrs. Devon?" replied Evans.
"I suppose my master had something to say to her, or he

would not have sent it ; besides, I should have thought you had too much *tact*, as we call it, to talk about such things."

" Tact ! Mr. Evans," said Mrs. Devon, " I like *that* vastly. When there is reason to be cautious, I believe nobody has more tact than I ; but every body knows what is expected of them when they come to a place. When I lived with Lady Saxmundham, as charming a lady as ever drew breath, if she sent for me even, I no more dared go into the room without knocking than I dared fly, especially during the hours of morning calls ; and all the time that Sir Harry Framlingham used to come there, day after day, before they were found out, I was always ready at the bottom of the back staircase, to take any letter he might have to leave ; and I'm sure when I was examined on the trial, nobody who knew so much, could have said so little as I did. I like your talking of tact to *me* ! "

" Well," said Mr. Hollis, the house-steward, " I don't like to hear of these things going on. I have often thought Evans's master rather too much all-in-all in our family. I have lived with my master ever since he was a boy ; I know his good-nature, I know his violence of temper, and I believe, when he is in a passion, nothing but blood would quench it ; and so, for a double reason, I dislike all this conversation, and I hope we shall have no more of it here. My mistress is, I dare say, a very nice lady, and in my opinion——"

" Too good for this world, Mr. Hollis," interrupted Evans ; " for if she had only managed Mrs. Devon as Lady Saxmundham did, we should not have heard this story of the letter, which, I must say, Mrs. Devon might as well have not told."

" I don't know that I *should* have noticed it, as it is," said Mrs. Devon, somewhat angry, " only that no confidence is placed in me ; trust me, and you might as well try to get a secret out of an oyster. But if I find out things of my own head, I have a right to do as I please ; and what made me think of it the more, was the flurry my lady was in before dinner. I'm sure I never saw her so in my life, and ——"

Here the sudden ringing of Mrs. Harbottle's bell put an end to the conversation.

From this brief extract, the reader may in some degree comprehend the extent of mischief innocently done by the agitated, wretched Harvey, who had inadvertently, and with no ill meaning, sown the seeds of dissension in that family, the fruits of which were not to be housed even in his lifetime.

But if the billet, innocent as it was, which he wrote, had created a sensation amongst the servants, what had been its effect upon Fanny ! The moment she saw Devon enter the room with a note, her worst fears were excited, and in the sequel her worst anticipations realised. Not only did its appearance convince her, that her incautious admissions of the morning had emboldened Charles to adopt a mode of addressing her which he had never before attempted ; not only did she see in this change of circumstances a change of feeling on his part towards her, but she saw, what it was clear he had entirely overlooked, that the novel, and it may be added, suspicious mode of communication which he had adopted, through the medium of her maid, (whose connivance in her whole lifetime she had never sought, and whose confidence she had never made,) could not fail to expose her to the observation of the whole *clique* of upper servants.

These were the minor considerations which perplexed her at the moment; but they sank into nothing when she read the following lines, written evidently in haste and trepidation : —

“ I have been invited to join a fishing party with *him*, to-morrow. I am, as you know, engaged to you, with Emma and Capt. Sheringham, at luncheon ; I felt it was better to accept the invitation. We start at four to-morrow morning — we shall meet at dinner. I could not go without explaining why I did so, and, when I came to the drawing-room, you were gone.

“ Ever yours,
“ C. H.”

The worst she feared had come to pass. One day before, what would it have signified whether he broke an engagement with the wife to accept an engagement with the husband? They lived on the most intimate terms — they were as one family — he had now separated the community of interests between them. Why? — because *she* had set him the example in the morning.

Her first impulse was to explain the whole affair to Harbottle when he should come from supper ; but at that period of the evening, or rather morning, he was usually ill calculated to comprehend clearly the points of any detail submitted to him ; and she felt sure that the lurking demon, jealousy, which never yet had shown itself on account of Harvey, would be roused into fury, if, in the confusion of his ideas, he jumbled the note written by Charles and sent clandestinely to his wife, by her maid, with the recollection of the intimacy in which they all lived. Had it been morning she would have made the matter a laughing one — as it was, silence was her only resource ; but if any thing had been wanting to add to the pang she already felt, it was the too certain assurance that the character of Harvey's affection for her — for she was conscious of his affection — was totally changed in the course of the last twelve hours.

On her own course she was resolved.

The morning dawned clear and fine, and scarcely had the clock proclaimed the hour of four, when Harbottle, who had purchased a sound sleep of three hours (as he professed to purchase every thing else) with wine and other libations in which he had indulged, rose quietly, and proceeded to dress for the promised sport, leaving the lovely Fanny in a sweet slumber, as he imagined. But, no ; sleep had been a stranger to her eyes that night, and when she came down to her solitary breakfast, she felt wretched — unrefreshed — unhappy.

When Emma Lovell arrived at the hall, which was before the appearance of Captain Sheringham, Fanny, who kept no secrets from *her*, and who looked to her as the only consolation she possessed in the world, communicated the whole of the circumstances which had occurred the day

before, and felt comparatively happy when she had thus unburdened her mind to her friend, and ascertained not only that the resolution to which she had come met with Emma's approbation, but that she even consented to do all in her power to carry it into effect.

What that resolution was, time will show.

While these affairs were in progress at Binford Hall, things were not altogether tranquil at Dale Cottage ; Lady Frances began to think (short as the period was that had yet elapsed) that the attentions of her son to somebody, whether Mrs. Harbottle or Miss Lovell (she had scarcely made up her mind which), were growing too particular ; the repeated luncheons, the frequent drives, and all the other incidents of each succeeding day considerably annoyed her ; and she resolved, as a reasonable mother had a right to do, at all events to call on Mrs. Harbottle somewhere about the hour of luncheon on that very morning, in order to see, as her ladyship said, " how the land lay."

Her opportune arrival just as they were sitting down to that sociable meal (for meal, a Binford luncheon decidedly was) was by no means disagreeable to the lady of the house, although George, who was most happily *planté* next the fascinating Emma, could, if truth were to be spoken at all times, have dispensed with the presence of his excellent and right honourable parent. Mrs. Harbottle felt, in *her* state of mind, a relief from society ; and although little inclined to join in conversation, which required much care or attention, the current of words which flowed from the vermillion lips of Lady Frances was so perpetual and incessant, that to see and listen was all that was required of her companions. Upon the present occasion it saved Fanny a world of trouble ; and while she was attending to her ladyship's anecdotes and historiettes of good society, George and Emma found the most favourable opportunity of doing that, which lovers invariably and incessantly do — talk about themselves.

Mrs. Harbottle carried her politeness so far as to invite Lady Frances to accompany them in their drive, begging her, if she would wave ceremony, subsequently, to stop and dine with them ; and, as his mother was to be of the

party, she felt she could take the liberty, without a special reference to her lord and master, of inviting Captain Sheringham to remain.

In pursuance of her plan of watching her son and Miss Lovell, rather than in the expectation of an agreeable day, Lady Frances accepted the invitation ; and an account having been given of the cause of Harvey's absence, the party proceeded to put into execution the different parts of the programme as settled the previous afternoon. How differently, however, the day passed off from that which preceded it !—Fanny's thoughts were occupied with her own position, and Emma, conscious from Lady Frances' manner, not only of the opinion she entertained of her, but of the suspicion which existed in her mind, as to her having *a design* upon her son, was equally stiffened into the most uncomfortable state of unsociability.

"This is neighbourly, my lady," said Harbottle, when he came home and found Lady Frances seated amongst the family party ready for dinner ; "I like this—I dare say, in time, when the autumn rains have taken some more of the London starch out of you, we shall get on uncommonly well together. Ha ! ha ! ha !"

"In the autumn," said Lady Frances, "I shall, I am sorry to say, not be here. I go to my brother Pevensey's at Grimsbury, for a month, and thence on a tour to different houses until Christmas, which I always keep at his."

"And do *you* leave us too, George ?" said Harbottle to Sheringham.

"Not so methodically," replied the Captain, "it depends a good deal upon shooting."

"If that's all," said Harbottle, "you need not leave my lands—I have the best covers, better preserved than any commoner's alive—the largest birds, and the greatest number, for the size of the property, in England ; I have spared no expense, no pains, no cost, no trouble, to secure that advantage."

"I am afraid I must not leave George here," said Lady Frances ; "he will get so much attached to you all, that I shall have no chance for a share of his affection."

"I am sure," said Mrs. Harbottle, "we will take the greatest care of Captain Sheringham."

"Lay him up in lavender till your ladyship comes back," said the Squire; "my wife is a capital hand at petting a favourite — is not she, Harvey? Ha! ha! ha!"

A more disagreeable reference under the circumstances could not have been well made; Harvey made a sort of unintelligible noise, and affected to look pleased. Mrs. Harbottle felt her heart beat, and was forced to hold her breath; and Emma Lovell, scarcely venturing to look up, took a hasty glance, under her eyelids, at the state of the party.

"I am in hopes," said her ladyship, "that George may get a ship."

"I used to be very anxious upon that point myself," said Sheringham; "but somehow my longing for employment, at least in peace time, has considerably abated of late."

Another pause ensued.

"Harvey," said Harbottle, "are you tired? you are as dull as a Dutchman."

"I am completely knocked up," said Harvey.

"Disappointed at your ill success with the trout, I take it," said Harbottle: "whether Fanny sympathises with you I cannot tell; but she, and even Emma, seem to me to be in doleful dumps about something, eh? Ha! ha! ha!"

"My dear Mr. Harbottle," said Lady Frances, "people cannot always command their spirits; besides, the surest way of keeping them down is noticing the depression; we have had a long drive, and a long walk to day."

Fanny said nothing in her defence, and Emma kept equally silent. It was, in fact, one of those parties in which each person was occupied with his own thoughts, and in which every body was acting his own particular part. Harbottle was the only straight-forward, plain-sailing member of the community; Fanny was wretched; so was Harvey, for he saw what she was suffering. She, conceiving he did so, increased her own misery by the apprehension that he would attribute her low spirits to a cause whence they did not spring, and sat in agonising

anxiety, waiting the arrival of the moment when he was to be undeceived.

Upon Harvey, sick at heart, and now tremblingly alive to the horrors of his situation, the truth had burst:—without a thought or consideration of consequences, he had yielded himself to the fascinations of a lovely woman, whose unaffected manners and generous kindness had, in the course of a long and intimate acquaintance, bound him heart and soul to her; while, unconscious of the character his passion was assuming, he had gone on fancying that what he felt was friendship pure and unalloyed. Now that his eyes were opened, and he found that he not only loved, but that Fanny, as he fancied, reciprocated that love, he became indifferent to every thing else, and unconscious of every thing that was passing around him. To think, too, that he, the cherished friend of Harbottle — his favourite companion — pressed to become an inmate in his house — honoured, caressed, and confided in — that *he* should be the viper in his bosom — the guilty wretch to work his sorrow, and, perhaps, his shame. These were the dreads and sorrows of the high-minded, honourable Harvey—and yet could he abandon *her*? — a thought beyond endurance. Could he at once break all the links which bound him to her — quit the scene of his happiness, and tear himself from the only being on earth, in whose society he delighted? It was, indeed, a struggle.

All this was passing in his mind during the early part of the evening, and it was not therefore to be expected that he should be a very agreeable member of the Binford coterie.

Emma Lovell's intellectual powers were so much concealed under an appearance, natural to her, of diffidence, and, as I have already said, to strangers, of coldness, that Lady Frances, with all her knowledge of the world, scarcely thought it worth while to *finesse* with her; so that the Parson's Daughter, perfectly alive to the object of her ladyship's visit, and aware that at the moment her ladyship was talking glibly of a gay and fashionable world to *her* unknown, she was attentively watching the effect which the detail of its pleasures produced upon her young mind,

leading her at the same time, by no very refined process, to express her opinions upon the advantages derivable from aristocratic connections and the introduction to society, which such connections would, probably, afford to a young woman of small means and smaller pretensions, put herself upon an equality with her ladyship, by playing a game too ; because, innocent as she was, and unconscious as she appeared to be, Emma not only saw that her ladyship's conversation had in it a design, but discovered the particular design which her ladyship vainly flattered herself she had most entirely concealed ; and thus, between caution on the one hand with her ladyship, and a recollection that she had in the course of the evening an arduous duty to perform with respect to somebody else, Miss Lovell was as little agreeable as it was possible for her to be.

Sheringham, who knew every sinuosity of his mother's mind, was equally alive to the object of her visit and the general tone of her conversation—but not willing to commit himself and risk an interdiction, perhaps, of future visits to the Hall, (which he would have felt it his duty to obey, not only from the impulse of filial obedience, but because, over and above that, her ladyship's property was entirely at her own disposal,) turned his little *galantries* upon Mrs. Harbottle, who, pleased in the midst of her sorrow to be employed in conversation, encouraged his observations and remarks, so that Harbottle and Harvey, finding themselves *basketed* (as the phrase goes), retired to the adjoining room, and began a rubber at billiards.

Lady Frances had then an opportunity of engaging Emma in a *tête-à-tête* on one sofa, while Sheringham and Fanny were enjoying the scene from another ; for if Emma were Fanny's confidant upon some occasions, it is but fair to believe that Fanny officiated in the same capacity for Emma upon others ; so that Mrs. Harbottle readily entered into the little conspiracy against Lady Frances with her son, and played off an innocent stratagem against her well-digested designs.

They were shortly interrupted by the return of the billiard players.

"Why, Fanny," said Harbottle, "what is the matter

with Harvey? does any body know? can't make a hazard — missed the commonest balls ; and has lost two love games."

"Upon my honour," said Harvey, "I cannot account for it; I believe the glare of the water, the early rising, and all the other things that have happened to me to-day, have dazzled my eyes. I cannot play, and that's the truth."

"Come, my lady," said Harbottle, "will you play a game at billiards?—capital table — full sized — Thurston's — best he ever made — eh! — paid him ten pounds extra for the cushions — ha! ha! ha! — come."

"I never played billiards," said her ladyship, "I will go and see you play."

"Come, Sheringham," said Harbottle, "come and play. I like billiards, my lady, it sounds such a pleasant game, all kisses and misses—eh! — Ha! ha! ha!"

A faint smile played on her ladyship's vermillioned lips.

"With all my heart," said the Captain ;—and all the party adjourned to the billiard-room except Harvey, who remained standing with his back to the fire-place, looking more dead than alive ; and Emma Lovell, who lingered in the drawing-room, as if she were looking for something which she had not lost.

"What *has* happened to you?" said Emma, speaking to Harvey. "You are looking wretchedly ill?"

"I *am* ill," said Harvey. "I'll go to my room — sleep, I know, I shall not—but I am only a bore here."

"Try the air of the conservatory," said Emma ;— "come,"—he hesitated—"I have something to say to you."—He followed her.

The drawing-rooms opened into this conservatory ; the lamps and candles within the apartments afforded a subdued yet agreeable light along the whole length of the building, darkening, of course, towards the farther end—a charming light for lovers—and midway between the entrance and the termination of the conservatory, was a fountain which played incessantly and made a rippling splashy noise, the sound of which gave an idea of freshness in a sultry evening, and at the same time rendered the convers-

ation which might be carried on, in its vicinity, sufficiently indistinct to baffle designing listeners.

Along this dimly-lighted avenue, formed by the loveliest and most fragrant—and of course in Harbottle's house most expensive—exotics, Emma Lovell proceeded with the astonished Harvey, and they had reached the fountain before she could muster courage to speak to him.—At length she broke silence.

"I told you," said Emma, "that I had something to say to you. I have undertaken to say it—I have promised, and, therefore, will fulfil my promise—but I fear that you will think it most extraordinary in me to make such a communication to you; indeed, I am conscious, I will not say of its impropriety, but of what must appear its indelicacy; yet when I tell you that there seemed to be no other course left, and that I will shrink from nothing in the way of friendship, I do think you will forgive me."

"What can you mean, Emma?" said Harvey.

"You have made Fanny miserable, Charles," said Emma, looking round as if she feared being overheard, or dreaded some watching witness hid among the plants.

"I?" said Charles. "How? how?"

"By writing a note to her last night, and sending it by her maid.—Listen.—I know all that has happened: your conversation with her after you left us yesterday afternoon. She has told me all; and she feels that if she had not said something which you must have misunderstood or misconstrued, you would not have taken a step which, besides all its other ills and miseries, has exposed her to the remarks of her maid, and the observations of the rest of the establishment."

"My only reason for writing," said Harvey, "was ——"

"I know—I know," said Emma; "or rather I do not wish to know. I want to impress upon your mind, for the sake of relieving our dear Fanny, that what she said with regard to the unsuitableness of marriages did not refer to her own position."

Here a shadow flitted across the light reflected on the pavement; Emma turned round and saw Fanny herself, who, having ascertained that her friend was engaged in her

affair, returned to the billiard-room to keep Lady Frances interested in the game.

"That she is happy, rely upon it — she will continue so, but you must be a party to that continuance."

"I?" said Charles.

"Yes, *you*," replied Miss Lovell. "Fanny would have spoken to you herself, but she felt unequal to the task. I have, as you see, undertaken it; her sense of delicacy would neither permit her to make the suggestion to you, nor did she feel at ease until she had, to avoid all appearance of deception or secrecy, imparted all the circumstances to me."

"Tell me," said Harvey, "in what way I may be instrumental to the restoration of her peace of mind, and her wishes to me shall be commands."

"First you must let me tell you her motives for asking this sacrifice," said Emma. "She feels, however much you may have misinterpreted her meaning, that she has lowered herself in your eyes."

"Good heavens!"

"Stay, Charles, stay — those are her feelings. She believes that she never again can meet and associate with you as she has hitherto done. We women are the best judges upon points like these. Do not bid me search too deeply for the causes of her decision — such is her feeling. If, therefore, you remain the constant inmate of this house, as you have hitherto been, think what a life of restraint, of duplicity, she must ever after live."

"Oh, Emma," said Harvey, "why — why is this necessary? I have said — I have done nothing to forfeit her good opinion. I have done nothing to forfeit the friendship and affection of her husband. Why should she feel —"

"Why — why ask me that?" said Emma. "That you are honourable and high-minded, I know; but you have betrayed a feeling which will render your continued residence here wretchedness to *her*, and, as I am certain, wretchedness to yourself. You are surprised to hear me speak in this new character, Charles. The cause makes me eloquent; and although I am convinced I need do no more than throw myself upon your honour and

generosity in this case, I would, were it necessary, appeal to you in the name of God to leave her."

"Emma," said Charles, "you will break my heart: am I to give up the society of her who of all others is dearest to me?"

"Hush, Charles, hush!" said Emma; "consider a moment how you are talking; reflect for an instant, and you will see that all I have said to urge your departure from this house is faint compared with the last few words you yourself have uttered —"

"But as a friend," interrupted Harvey.

"I did not mean," said Emma, "to have argued this part of the subject at all; I am not competent, and if I were, it would not be fit I should. My communication is merely this: Fanny feels — why I cannot now recapitulate — that her peace of mind depends upon your — not abandoning the house or her acquaintance altogether — but upon your varying the scene of your existence, and for the present leaving Binford. That is the extent of my communication. We have been led into the discussion of other points unintentionally. I have expressed her wishes, which you have said you should consider as commands. We shall now see how you will act; but, in conclusion of what I had to say, I am to add from *her*, that although she feels this sacrifice necessary to her comfort, and even respectability, she asks it with pain and sorrow, and that in parting from you, she does so with unaltered esteem and regard, and with the wish that every happiness on earth may attend you."

"Is it possible," said Harvey; "is it possible that I —"

"Hush, hush," said Emma, "they are here. Walk on. I feel half guilty myself. I was asked to make a sacrifice — I did not hesitate —"

"Well, upon my word, Miss Lovell," cried Harbottle, "why we have lost you and your sighing swain.—What have you done with him, Harvey, eh? where have you got to? why, Harvey?"

And so he continued calling, and marching along the conservatory, followed by Sheringham (who was in fact

miserable at the long disappearance of the missing pair), Lady Frances and Mrs. Harbottle bringing up the rear. There they might have walked and long have searched, and yet in vain, for neither Harvey nor his exemplary monitress felt equal to encountering the boisterous mirth of their vivacious host ; and having walked rapidly along in advance, they left the conservatory by the door at the other end of it, and passed on to the terrace-walk, where Harvey, having fervently pressed Emma's hand, rushed from her towards another door of the house ; while she, proceeding leisurely in order to collect her flurried spirits, entered the billiard-room by one of the windows which opened on to the lawn, and, when the hunting party returned to the drawing-room, was found ensconced in the corner of a sofa, assiduously reading a novel ; a pursuit in which she might have obtained considerable credit, if Harbottle, who was as quick as his neighbours at what he called "finding things out," had not observed that she was holding the volume, upon which she was so attentively occupied, upside down.

This discovery, added to her long conversation with Harvey, and his subsequent disappearance, created great apparent merriment amongst all the party, and they laughed, as Scrub says in the play, "most consumedly;" Harbottle, because he really enjoyed it and always laughed, Lady Frances because she was convinced that Miss Lovell's *tête-à-tête* with Charles Harvey must entirely satisfy her dear George Augustus Frederick of the absurdity of thinking of her any longer ; and Mrs. Harbottle, because her heart was breaking, and that nothing but a violent display of affected mirth could conceal its real anguish.

Harbottle sent to make enquiries after Harvey, and word was brought that he had retired to rest ; and then Emma had again to endure all the rallying of having ill-treated and rejected him ; and all the reproachful and even fierce looks of the gallant sea-captain, who took every opportunity while his mother's watch "was slack," to telegraph his beautiful prize with signal activity ; while she, having deliberately turned her book the right way, proceeded with immovable serenity to continue reading, or seeming to

read, until the accustomed trays, and eatables, and drinkables made their appearance.

For a merry, wealthy, happy party, never, perhaps, did there separate for the night a more agitated, worried, miserable collection of people than the then present company ; save and except always the master of the house.

CHAPTER VII.

This, this has thrown a serpent to my heart,
While it o'erflow'd with tenderness, with joy,
With all the sweetness of exulting love ;
Now, nought but gall is there and burning poison.

THOMSON.

IT cannot fail to strike the reader that simple, and just, and honourable as were the events of this curious evening, the appearance of affairs in general was not only extremely suspicious, but well calculated to excite various contending feelings in most of the assembled company ; all of which feelings, however, as it turned out, were perfectly unfounded in reason or reality.

Lady Frances went home satisfied that there was no danger to be apprehended from the eagerness of the Parson's Daughter to ensnare her son, and equally assured that his advances towards the wife of the Squire were not more likely to be well received. She, adept as she was in all the tracasseries of flirtation, and the economy of conservatories, had made up her mind that something decisive had been done that night in the case of Emma and Harvey ; and although she inclined to believe that he had proposed and been rejected, still the coldness which seemed to exist between Emma and her son, during the morning, and which arose from a studied caution on the part of the young lady, of which her ladyship scarcely suspected her capable, aided naturally, however, by the anticipation of the act of duty which she knew she had subsequently to

perform for her friend, and which engrossed most of her thoughts, superadded to her total abandonment of him in the evening, completed her security ; and when, while they were lighting their bed-room candles at Dale Cottage, and her ladyship was winding up the day with her accustomed bottle of soda-water modified in the tumbler by a brown composition, which her butler called syrup with a very fine name (but which the unmedical student would ignorantly have described as old cogniac), her ladyship ventured to try the effect of a little playful satire upon the manners and conversation of Miss Lovell, and she found George, instead of firing up and bursting out as her defender and advocate, admitting that he thought she did not look quite so well as usual, and that her manner was very unsatisfactory, and that she was not the sort of person a man of condition would like to walk into a drawing-room with, hanging on his arm ; her ladyship received the filial adieu of her dear George Augustus Frederick for the night, with a complacency and confidence which it must be confessed had been strangers to her mind during the last three weeks.

But what a night for George ! devoted, as he really was, to this amiable, admirable girl—a pattern for her sex—all kindness, all gentleness, all sweetness and truth—to think that, having encouraged his addresses, as she had decidedly done ; having, not perhaps directly or personally, but hypothetically, in conversation with himself and Mrs. Harbottle, expressed her approbation of temper, qualities, and accomplishments, such as he could not be so blind as not to perceive himself possessed of, that approbation having been expressed in a manner which Mrs. Harbottle had led her to adopt, with a view to induce her devoted lover (for so he had unconsciously become) to hope for that conclusion to his suit which she herself so much desired—to think that at once, abruptly, inconsiderately and cruelly, as he felt it, she should abstract herself from the assembled party with a man for whom, twenty-four hours before, she had declared a total indifference in the character of lover—upon which she had before been rallied—seemed to him so wilfully, so unnecessarily coquettish and heartless, that

he could only reconcile it with the exemplary rectitude of principle which he had previously so ardently admired in the whole course of her conduct, by exclaiming, as thousands of his fellow-men have exclaimed before him, and will exclaim when he shall be no more, "What extraordinary creatures these women are!"

Emma herself suffered deeply and bitterly. She had made a sacrifice which nothing but a noble and pious resolution to fulfil all the duties of life could have induced her to risk, in holding such a conversation as that, which she had held with Charles Harvey; her mind, her moral courage, rose above the difficulties which presented themselves to the interference of a girl inexperienced in the world's ways—unmarried—unprotected, except by her own purity of heart and consciousness of rectitude, and to her discussion of such a point as that, in which she had engaged with a man suspected too of being her lover.

What could she have done? how could she have acted? her dearest, best friend, had near her at the moment no friend but her; her conscience, in its "small, still voice," had spoken volumes to her. Fanny—her dear kind Fanny—had reverted with dread and trembling to the momentary slumber of her prudence, or, perhaps, the momentary awakening of her feelings, as one fraught with destruction to her own happiness, and—what, perhaps, she held as dear—the happiness of another. She was on the very edge of a precipice. The intervention of Emma's hand could prevent her fall—was it to be refused? Fanny could not remove herself from the scene of difficulty and danger—to rescue her from both, Emma had stept from her natural sphere in society, and ventured all, to preserve her friend. But it must not be supposed that she had been led blindly to assume the character of adviser or mistress, nor that she did not see the peril and delicacy—perhaps, indelicacy—of the service she had undertaken. She saw them clearly—but, as has been said before, she risked every thing—and felt happy in having, as she believed, succeeded in bringing Harvey to understand the necessity of his breaking off his constant association with Harbottle's family, without committing her friend by any

admission of a partiality for him, which, even if it existed, had taken no form, no character, which the most rigid virtue could have disapproved.

But when she laid her head upon her pillow and recollect ed the pain she had evidently given Sheringham, the reproachful look which he cast upon her as she quitted the house, flashed strongly upon her. The world might think of her conduct—if the world could ever know it—as it pleased. What Lady Frances might have thought of her, or what the Squire might the next day say of her, were matters of perfect indifference to her, strong as she was in the consciousness of her good intentions; but that Sheringham should think her—as it turned out he did—the frivolous, heartless flirt, which she must have appeared, was bitterly painful to her—the more painful, because she never could explain to him the real circumstances of the case; and because, if, as she sincerely hoped and really expected, Harvey should quit Binford on the morrow, his sudden disappearance would confirm the already excited suspicions of the Captain that the lengthened conversation between them on the preceding evening, however it might have terminated, was upon a subject personally interesting to themselves, and of a nature which the repeated protestations of the young lady would, if he had not seen it, have led him to believe one, which could not for a moment have been entertained by her.

Harvey's meditations—although not amongst “the Tombs”—were of a deadly character—he had been awakened suddenly from a delightful but perilous dream. He felt at first indignant and then ashamed that Fanny had betrayed him; he could not have mistaken her meaning—she had admitted that she was not happy, and he had sympathised with her affliction—no thought had ever entered his head which could militate against her peace of mind, her honour, or the honour of her husband. Why then expose him? Why drive him from her presence?—For the sake of appearances?—No—for he had lived on terms of the closest intimacy with her for months, and no human being had dared to whisper a suspicion of any consequent impropriety.—What was all this? did she dis-

semble when she wished him happiness, at the moment in which she was destroying the only happiness he possessed? and did she really wish him away? what could it mean?

Harvey was the least vain person in the world; and amongst all the reasons which he imagined Fanny to have for seeking a separation from him, that which was certainly first amongst the number never struck him. He was told he had a duty to perform, the fulfilment of which alone could secure her peace of mind and insure her respectability—that duty, heedless of the pain it might inflict upon himself, and without questioning her more, he resolved to do.

To describe the pangs which Fanny herself endured would be difficult; the complication of fears and reproaches with which her mind was filled—the sensitive recollection of the fatal walk—for so it proved to be—in which she felt she had betrayed a sorrow which for years she had concealed; the consciousness of a change in Harvey's manner consequent upon that confession; the pain of parting with him, who, while he joined in the pursuits of her husband, seemed to temporise with every thing disagreeable which might occur, soothe him when irritated, and even support him in his proper place while mixing with the lower classes of his neighbours, who were, in fact, his most frequent associates. A young man, who was of that husband the chosen, and certainly the most agreeable companion; suitable to him by his skill in all the sports of the field, and, by a kind adaptation of his manner, to the temper of his host;—in short, she felt that she was breaking a link in the chain of their society, the loss of which would create disorder and confusion in the establishment, and render her existence even more painful than it was. But she felt that she had trusted herself to the extreme limits of prudence, and that she dare not hesitate to decide upon the course she had to pursue.

What Harbottle suffered during the same night will require no great trouble, nor many words to describe; once safely deposited upon his sinister side, his rubicund cheek snugly reposed upon an eider-down pillow, he fell uncontrollably to sleep, and when he awoke described to his fair

Fanny the misery he had felt in a dream that a five pound fish (at least) had snapped off the top-joint of his four guinea rod just as he thought he had safely landed him.

Happy Harbottle !

When the breakfast hour came, Fanny did not appear. Mrs. Devon, however, exhibited her pretty plump person, to make her lady's excuses.—“ My mistress, sir,” said she, “ has got such a *very* bad headache that she will breakfast in her dressing-room.”

This was communicated to the Squire, as he stood at the hall door watching the chestnut cantering round the sweep before it.

“ Headache,” said the Squire, “ what an odd thing to have—she did not tell me she had a headache. Well—I hope she'll soon get better—give my love to her, and say so.”

“ Yes, sir,” said Mrs. Devon, with a look which either he did not see, or seeing did not comprehend; “ I hope she will, sir, *I'm sure.*”

“ Holloa,” cried the Squire, seeing Hollis crossing the hall, “ we are ready for breakfast—where's Mr. Harvey?”

“ I don't know, sir,” said Hollis, with an expression of countenance very different from that of Mrs. Devon, but which, if the Squire had been, like Lady Frances, on the “ look out” for effects, might have struck him.

“ Is he up?” said the Squire? “ have you seen him about?”

“ No, sir,” said Hollis. “ Evans says his master has got a very bad headache this morning, and I rather think he is gone out to walk.”

“ What!” said Harbottle, “ Harvey got a headache too—that's mighty strange! Why he had a headache last night, and still has got a headache this morning—that's odd. Your mistress has got one this morning and hadn't one last night—what is it?—any thing in the air—or the water—or the wine!—can't be in the wine, because at the price I pay, there isn't a headache in a hog's-head of it.”

“ No, sir,” said Hollis, “ I don't think it has any thing to do with *that*, sir.”

This observation, Mr. Hollis, who was an exemplary servant of the family—old, and consequently familiar with his master, favoured, and, therefore, presuming—meant should lead to some further interrogatories ; but Harbottle's head was as firm as the wall of a fives' court, and the harder you hit him with a hint the stronger it came back to you, without having made the slightest impression.

" Well, then," said the Squire, " I must breakfast by myself. *I* have no headache luckily, so cut me some of that cold roast beef—give me two eggs—a hot kidney, and a cup of chocolate, just to begin with."

All this was put *en train*, and Hollis hovered about, full of anxiety to make a *coup*, perhaps, with a good intention, which would infallibly have destroyed the peace of half-a-dozen innocent people ; but he was as yet unsuccessful, for a footman remained in the breakfast-room during the greater part of the Squire's solitary repast ; and before it was over, his head keeper obtained an audience, to depict in glowing colours the iniquitous proceedings of certain poachers, who, early as it was in the season, had been setting snares for the hares. This announcement superseded all other topics—the breakfast itself, elaborated as it was in its delicacies, was speedily concluded, and in ten minutes the Squire, on the back of the very best cob in England, was cantering down to the scene of villainy.

The complaint nicknamed cholera has made great ravages in every country it has visited : the plague in its time has done even yet more mischief ; but neither the plague nor cholera ever did more in a small circle than headache at Binford on the memorable day now under discussion. Harvey—with a violent headache—anticipating that Mrs. Harbottle, after what had occurred the night before, would rather avoid the breakfast table, felt above all things in the world the impossibility of maintaining his usual tone of conversation in a *tête-à-tête* with the Squire ; he, therefore, (anxious, moreover, to evince to Emma Lovell the firmness of the determination to which he had come during a sleepless night,) resolved to walk to the Parsonage and beg a breakfast of the exemplary rector ; knowing, as he did,

that as that reverend and worthy divine was incapable of moving from his room without assistance, and wholly unable to walk about for pleasure — as walking is sometimes called — he should have an opportunity in a short stroll after breakfast along the laurel walk which led to the church, to “say his say” to his charming daughter, who, having assumed the character of plenipotentiary on the part of Mrs. Harbottle, and having stated the preliminaries of the treaty which she wished to enter into, had unquestionably subjected herself either to a conference with the other high contracting party, or to the evil of Heaven knows how many protocols, which, after all, might, like their namesakes upon greater occasions, have come to nothing in the end.

This scheme he put into practice — was most readily accepted as a guest by the Rector, and heard with dismay the account of Miss Lovell's headache, which was so extremely violent, that she could not come down to breakfast. Here was another “case” — decided — nor was his distress at all alleviated by finding an ancient maiden sister of the Rector's (whose stay with her brother had afforded Emma the opportunity of spending more time at the Hall than her exemplary attention to her father would otherwise have allowed her) *without* a headache, and in the full possession of all that well-matured flightiness, which, to a young man in Harvey's temper of mind, was worse than death itself.

Breakfast proceeded slowly — the conversation flagged — Mr. Lovell was as usual amiable, and even eloquent ; but as far as Harvey was concerned, his eloquence was wasted in the desert air. Miss Lovell the elder was pertinaciously particular as to the number of lumps of sugar he chose in his tea, and whether he liked cream ; went through the catechism of her office with a rigorous punctuality most exemplary, and had just attained the *ultima thulé* of her knowledge, when the door opened and Captain Sheringham was announced, to the great delight of the Rector, who was charmed at seeing his neighbour — to the astonishment of Harvey — and, as it turned out, to the inexpressible dismay of the gallant Captain himself.

The moment he saw Harvey domesticated at the Rectory, he started back — he cast his eyes round — Emma was not there — this soothed him for the moment, but he looked as white as a sheet.

"Why, my dear Captain Sheringham," said the Rector, "you don't look well; what on earth is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, sir," said Sheringham, "nothing but a violent headache."

Another instance of the prevailing epidemic, for which the present appearance of affairs did not promise any thing like alleviation or cure. However much the temporary absence of Miss Lovell from the breakfast table might at the first blush of the scene have calmed Sheringham's apprehensions, the presence there, at that period of the day, unusual as he knew it was, of Harvey, combined with the agitation so perceptible in *his* countenance, and a nervous anxiety of manner which it was impossible for him to conceal, confirmed him in his worst suspicions. What but a conversation of the deepest interest could have detained Emma with him for nearly an hour in the conservatory the evening before ; and what termination could that conversation have had, but one propitious to the hopes and wishes of Harvey, which could have induced him, *contrary* to his usual course of life, to follow up so protracted and particular a dialogue by so early a visit to the Rectory ?

Breakfast disposed of, and the Rector wheeled into his library, a scene followed, the like of which is often enacted in higher places and by more important personages, which, being performed by two individuals, is in colloquial phrasology called — one seeing the other out.

Harvey was seriously anxious to have a few minutes' conversation with Miss Lovell, in order to announce the resolution at which he had arrived, having pledged himself to her not to touch upon the subject of their conversation to Fanny, nor to make any reference to its object, to *her* during his stay at Binford, even if the opportunity should accidentally be afforded him ; a circumstance which, however Emma told him she did not think likely to occur, since Fanny had resolved to avoid the possibility of a *tête-à-tête*

with him. *He*, therefore, was fixed in his resolution to see the Parson's Daughter.

Sheringham, on the other hand, first irritated by the marked preference, as he considered it, which Emma had evinced towards Harvey during the preceding evening — then goaded still more sharply by the well-timed and well-turned insinuations of his world-knowing mother, was now wound up to the highest pitch of jealous indignation, by finding his rival, as he thought him, and his favoured rival, as he believed him, established in the very citadel.

"Are you going towards the Hall?" said he to Harvey, with a strained civility.

"Not yet," replied Harvey.

"Where's Harbottle?" said the Captain.

"At home, I suppose," replied Harvey; "if you want to see him, I dare say you will find him alone."

"Is Mrs. Harbottle ill?" said Sheringham.

"Not that I know of," said Harvey; looking a little confused.

"I thought she seemed feverish last night," said Sheringham.

"I did not observe," said Harvey.

"No, you were botanising all the evening," said Sheringham: "did you discuss all the merits of the Darwin school? I am afraid Miss Lovell got cold in that odious conservatory."

"No," interrupted her aunt, "she has no cold, only a headache — she is not used to the late hours which she has been keeping at Mr. Harbottle's since I have been stopping with my brother, and given her a holyday."

"Shall you go to the Hall to luncheon?" asked Harvey.

"I don't know," answered Sheringham; "I rather think not — I am engaged with my mother, and —"

"I am going over to Smedley," said Harvey.

"When do you start?"

"— Not yet — not till two."

"Will you come to us, and we will drive you over?" said Sheringham.

"I cannot do that," replied Harvey; "for I — I have to meet a person — that —"

"Oh!" interrupted Sheringham, "I don't want to question your proceedings; every man has his own particular pursuit; perhaps you are going botanising again."

"Not I, indeed," said Harvey, in a tone which, as it sounded somewhat melancholy, was extremely agreeable to Sheringham's ears.

At this moment a footman entered the room, who walked directly up to Harvey, and in a sonorous voice, the tone of which strongly resembled the sound of a cracked trumpet, delivered this message:—

"My young lady has sent down word, her compliments, sir—she begs you wo'n't go away till she has seen you."

Harvey made a sort of unintelligible answer, expressive of his obedience to her wishes. Sheringham stared with amazement at this open and unequivocal address to his rival, and the servant who had been told by Miss Lovell's maid to deliver her message to Mr. Harvey (she not being aware that any other visiter was in the house) strutted out of the room, banging the door after him with a theatrical air, leaving the party in a profound silence, broken only by the retreating sound of his creaking shoes along the lobby.

"Well," said the Captain, after a moment's pause, "I'll go—I suppose my mother will like to drive early, and I am too dutiful to keep her waiting—good morning, Mr. Lovell—good morning, madam—good day, sir."

Saying which, the last words being addressed somewhat significantly to Harvey, (who, conscious of what was passing in Sheringham's mind, and anxious, without daring, to undeceive him, felt them sink deeply into his heart,) the gallant sea-officer quitted the Parsonage, breathing vengeance upon his rival, and all sorts of maledictions upon the fickleness and frailty of women generally, but of Miss Emma Lovell most especially and particularly.

Things certainly did not go smoothly, and appearances fully justified all the feelings which agitated Sheringham's mind; feelings, of the strength of which he had no idea until they were thus suddenly and violently called forth. He had gone on loving, and loving without exactly knowing the condition of his own heart, and had been playing with Emma Lovell the same game of entanglement that

Harvey, with equal unconsciousness, had been carrying on with her friend Fanny. It is wonderful to see the blindness of man to his own position, and not less wonderful to see to what trifles his sudden enlightenment is sometimes owing.

As he walked home, the first decision to which the Captain came, was, that whatever he might eventually determine upon as the line of conduct to pursue, he would by no means let his lady mother into his confidence. Stay in Binford he could not — to be the tame spectator of his rival's triumph, and the dreadful consequences of Emma's heartlessness. It was clear *she* could not quit the scene of action ; for even if, after her marriage, Harvey took her to his own house and home, still the position of her father in Binford, and her affectionate intimacy with Fanny, would bring her constantly thither ; and, indeed, the well-known friendship of the Squire himself for the bridegroom elect, would render their visits neither “few nor far between.”

What had he best do ? If he did not confide his secret to Lady Frances, the facts would very shortly speak for themselves ; for Sheringham thought (and reasonably enough it must be admitted) that, after the conservatory scene in the evening, and the verbal message of the morning, the announcement of Emma's acceptance of Harvey could not long be delayed ; *that* he could not wait for, because his mother would have gained so complete a victory over him, and would consequently thereupon indulge herself in so triumphant an exposure of the fallacy of all his doctrines and opinions about that amiable, unsophisticated, candid, affectionate child of nature, the Parson's Daughter, that she would drive him mad. In the course of his progress homeward, however, he formed his final resolution.

Harbottle, who, though he was ordinarily obtuse enough, and took things quietly when they went on quietly of themselves, was not an unconcerned spectator of the events of this memorable morning ; and the more concerned, perhaps, inasmuch as his own personal comfort had been infringed. He had been left to breakfast alone ; his wife pleaded a headache for not coming down, which she had not even mentioned half an hour before. Harvey's absence

was unusual ; and then he began to think the manner of Hollis, the butler, was strange, and that Mrs. Devon's conduct had something odd in it too ; and at last, after revolving all these circumstances in what he called his mind, as he walked his cob back from the fields of poaching, he hit upon what he believed to be the truth ; and coupling the strange dispersion of his little domestic party with the conservatory scene of the preceding evening, came to the determination that Harvey had popped (as he called it) to the Parson's Daughter, and that the Parson's Daughter had refused him. Full of this happy conceit, his anxiety to get hold of his young friend, to rally him upon the repulse he had encountered was particularly strong.

Unfortunately, however, Mrs. Harbottle, knowing that her husband had quitted the house, and not knowing that he had returned, and being in the most nervous state of expectation of the appearance of her old friend and ally Emma Lovell, happened to present herself to the eyes of her admiring husband as he was crossing the hall, and she was descending the staircase.

"Why, Fan," said the Squire, "your head well already !— glad of it, old lady. Where's Harvey? Is he gone away for ever? What has happened to him? — Love, I suppose, eh, Fan? — love, and a little indiscretion in bringing things to a conclusion too hastily? — Ha! ha! ha!"

"I am sure," said Mrs. Harbottle, "I don't know. What do you mean?"

"Oh, fie! Fan," said the Squire, "as if you and Emma were not in each other's secrets. What was all that talk in the greenhouse last night about?"

"Last night!" stammered Mrs. Harbottle.

"Yes, last night, Mrs. Grave-airs," said her husband ; "none are so blind as those who wo'n't see, my love ; none so deaf as those who wo'n't hear. Do you think to trick me? No no, Fan — I'm wide awake to all that is going on."

Fanny felt herself ready to sink through the earth.

"Nothing can be more natural," continued Harbottle. "So far from blaming Harvey, my idea of the 'thing' is simply this — give a young man encouragement, and you

must look out for the consequences ; and I know that you—I saw it by your manner — you put her upon doing what she did last night, which has upset poor Charles ; and will no doubt drive him away from our house, and rob me of one of my most agreeable companions. I knew something had happened while he was out fishing, he was as dull and as dead as ditch-water, and what the evening before had begun, last night concluded. I tell you what, mistress Fan, you women would do well to consider in the first instance ; it is the *premier pas*, that *coutes*, as the French say, and I do think, after fooling a man like a child in leading-strings for half a year, to let him go slap-bang, as I call it, in a minute, is an infernal shame."

The opinions of Mr. Harbottle, delivered so oracularly, founded as they were upon an apparently perfect knowledge of facts, startled his already agitated lady into a state of hysterical feeling, a kind of April sensation of rain and sunshine, which it required all her physical strength and all her mental determination to check. It was impossible that he really did know the nature of Emma's conversation with Harvey on the preceding evening, and yet hold the mild and moderate language in which he addressed her ; nor was it upon the cards that he should argue upon the heartlessness of his own wife's conduct, in first encouraging and then repelling the attentions of her husband's friend. What could it mean ? Into her mind never at the moment flashed the idea that he believed in the existence of an attachment, on the part of Harvey, towards Miss Lovell, because she knew of her own knowledge — somewhat hazardously obtained — that his affections were otherwise directed ; and, moreover, because she also knew that Emma's heart was irrecoverably gone, and that no power on earth could wean or force her from her devotion to Sheringham, of whom she had expressed to her friend her unqualified admiration.

But while Fanny was thus doubting how to receive the agreeable raillery of her husband, whose playfulness very much resembled in character that of the heavy animal, which, as the fable tells us, once upon a time attempted to ape the lap-dog ; who should arrive in sight upon the lawn

but Emma Lovell, leaning on the arm of Charles Harvey, evidently in earnest conversation upon some interesting topic, in which both parties had been so much absorbed, that they had not seen the unfortunate Captain George Augustus Frederick Sheringham, R.N., whom they had passed, as he was slowly sauntering homewards under the trees, debating whether he should put into immediate execution the design which it has already been mentioned he had formed, and which the very agreeable spectacle he had just witnessed did not in any degree conduce to procrastinate.

The sight of the coming couple exhilarated the Squire so much, that quitting his lady, who had not strength either to accompany or follow him, he gave his usual *view halloo*, which echoed through the woods, and then ran forward to meet the much disconcerted pair.

"I'm glad to see this," said the Squire. "I have just been talking over your long gossip of last night, with Fanny. She has confessed, at least she has not denied, that I have found out the whole secret, and I have given her a good jobation, as I call it, for breaking up a snug party, and driving you away."

Emma looked at Harvey—Harvey looked at Emma.

"Why, you think I don't know the whole affair," said Harbottle. "I'm not such a fool, Charles, as you and my wife think me; but I care less about it, for as I see you here together, I conclude you have made matters up, and I shall hear no more about going off, and going out, and leaving me to breakfast by myself, my wife ill with a headache, and my friend sick with a heartache."

"I don't quite comprehend you," said Emma. "What possible connection can my innocent conversation with Mr. Harvey have with his going out and leaving you this morning, or why should our walk in the conservatory necessarily imply a quarrel?"

"Why did he slink to bed? — Eh, master Charles, answer that; stole away, sly fox — could not face us after the interview, good, bad, or indifferent, which ever it was: and you, demure Emma, who look, as I say to Fan, as if butter would not melt in your mouth, why did you snub

the poor fellow as you did? I heard what you were at — a man cannot help his feelings, and what if he did fancy he was better thought of, than he really was, why, as I say, the woman's always to blame. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Upon my word," said Miss Lovell, increasing her rate of walking, "I do assure you I do not in the least understand what you are talking of. Though Mrs. Harbottle and I — and —"

And so away ran Emma, too much bewildered to comprehend in the least the extraordinary, and to her ear equivocal, allusions of the Squire.

"Well, Charles," said Harbottle, when Emma had, like a sylph, flitted across the lawn, and joined her equally amazed and agitated friend, "where did you breakfast? — at the parson's?"

"I did," said Charles.

"That's right," replied his friend; "faint heart never won fair lady — knocked down last night, up again this morning; the *iræ amorum*, as I used to say at school, turned into the *integratio amoris* — that's good Greek, isn't it? well, you got snubbed for your boldness and went to bed to cry, *I dare say* — at 'em again, says you — so you breakfasted with the parson, foraged upon the enemy, and took your prisoner."

"I am going away for a week or two," said Charles, "so I went to the Rectory to take leave of Mr. Lovell and his sister."

"Oh, you *are* going away," said Harbottle, "and arn't I as good as a witch; and our little snow-drop, as I call her, is the cause."

"No," said Harvey; "I really have business in London which must be attended to; here the days fly so sweetly and so rapidly, that unless I make a dash and break the charm at once, I shall go on in a dream of blessed happiness and be ruined for my negligence."

"Come, come, Master Harvey," said his hospitable host, "you have no business in London; you have been snubbed — the women-folk, as I call them, have driven you away; however, you must do as you please. I force no man, only I *do* bargain for three days more of you — try

us for only three days — I'll engage that Emma shall not poison you, and Fanny will enter into the same compact. I have got some pleasant folks coming here to stay till Friday, and go before *that* you positively shall not."

Harvey who, after a severe struggle with his feelings, had agreed to the condition of withdrawing himself, felt a sort of secret satisfaction at being forced by Harbottle to break that condition, so that, by doing a *douce violence* to his conscience, he might safely affirm that he was unable to refuse the pressing invitation of Harbottle to stay three days more, without exciting a strong suspicion in his mind that there really was some serious reason for his sudden departure ; he, therefore, with his eyes fixed upon Fanny and Emma, and perfectly conscious of the subject of their conversation, made an odd sort of unintelligible noise, which might serve for a negative or an affirmative, but which Harbottle (who with all his faults was the most hospitable creature breathing) instantly construed into a favourable reply to his invitation ; and having heard it, he hurried with his friend to join the ladies, and inform his wife that he had succeeded in keeping Charles till Friday morning, in spite of the ill-treatment of Miss Lovell.

The reproachful look which Emma glanced at the unhappy young gentleman was lost upon the Squire, whose attention not having yet been that way directed, was not devoted at that moment to Fanny ; perhaps, if it had been, he might have read in *her* lovely countenance a still stronger evidence of the dismay which the alteration of Charles's resolution had excited in her.

The dread which she endured had been thus created. In the anxiety of her heart to put a stop to a delusion which appeared to her to subsist at least on one side, and which must lead, as she felt, to misery or ruin, perhaps to both, she had taken such a course as proved her consciousness of its existence. After the conversation which she had begged Emma to have with Charles, she could no longer affect to be ignorant of the turn which his friendship — at least — had taken ; nor were the subsequent declarations of Harvey to Miss Lovell in their morning's walk at all calculated to put Fanny's agitation to rest ; in fact,

she herself, with the best possible motives, had fired the train — a day's delay might cause its explosion. With this consciousness of how far she had committed herself, and a knowledge of Charles's affection for her (since confessed to Emma), every hour's procrastination of his departure accumulated new pains and perils for them both.

Fanny's desire for his going was not founded upon any hope of being relieved from the misery of her own thoughts by his absence ; she felt that having one object constantly in the mind was even more dangerous than having it always in sight — for as somebody (I forget now who) has said, “We are not accustomed to keep such an exact guard over our thoughts, as we are compelled to keep upon our actions ; and when the mind once gives itself up to a separate pleasure, the heart grows jealous, and slyly steals in for its share.”

The thing appeared, however, decided ; and both the ladies felt that their taking any part in persuading Mr. Harvey not to stay would, besides irritating the inflammable squire, have a very extraordinary appearance, and one which might lead to explanations by no means seasonable or agreeable.

They, therefore, contented themselves with a few common-place observations, and having made those, fell off as it were in their walk with the beaux, and left the Squire and his friend to visit the stables, and eventually to ride together ; the Squire having previously begged his lady to invite Lady Frances and the Captain to dinner, she having expressed an intention of going to make a visit at Dale Cottage during the morning ; an intention founded on the determination of avoiding the usual “luncheon” at home.

CHAPTER VIII.

Oh, Love! how are thy precious sweetest moments
Thus ever crossed, thus vexed with disappointments!

Rowe.

"WHAT a trial will the three next days be for *me*!" said Mrs. Harbottle to Emma, when they parted from the men, and were on their way to Lady Frances; "and yet, I do not see how, without exciting *his* suspicion, Charles could have refused to stop."

"Nor I," said Emma.

"To think," continued Fanny, half in soliloquy, "that I should have reduced myself to such a position as that in which I actually find myself; — did you hear, Emma, what I said just this moment? did you hear me talk of exciting *his* suspicion? — how fallen am I in my own estimation within the few last hours of my life! — up to yesterday, neither had I fear of *his* suspicions, nor he cause to be suspicious: I had no care for the events of the day; no anxiety, no watchfulness — all — all was clear and plain before me — I had no deceit — and even if I had thoughts to conceal, I had no wishes to suppress; but now, owing to my own weakness, — wickedness is it not? — I am the sport of feelings, of which a week ago I had no knowledge, and the victim of apprehensions which were then strangers to my mind."

"My dearest Fanny," said Emma, "you unjustly accuse and unnecessarily agitate yourself; you have done all that you could do; conscious of the possibility of your feelings being misconstrued by a man who is living on the most intimate terms in your family, you have caused the expressions, which you perhaps inadvertently used in a conversation with him to be so explained, as to set the matter entirely at rest. After feeling that such an explanation was necessary, I agree with you, that his going, merely as removing an object from your society, which is associated in your mind with regret, is most desirable: at

your entreaty I tell him so ; he assents to the proposition ; do, therefore, bear up for these next three days, mix in general society, affect a gaiety, if you have it not, and hereafter when you meet him again, you will meet upon as friendly terms as ever."

" Ah, Emma," replied Fanny, " that inadvertence, as you call it, has been the ruin of my happiness ; you may rely upon it, the affection which is declared is never so strong as that which betrays itself — a premeditated speech is never half so eloquent as an involuntary sigh, and those words in which I inadvertently admitted the real feelings of my heart will be sooner or later fatal to some of us."

" My dear Fanny," said Emma, " if you treat the matter so very gravely, and feel it so very deeply, I shall begin almost to fear that the agitation which Charles's brief stay occasions will be succeeded by a bitterer feeling when he goes."

" No, no, no, I declare to you," said Fanny, emphatically, " I have no hesitation in telling you ; why should I ? — you know it — you must see it, that I admire Charles. I think him a delightful companion — I am charmed with his society, his conversation, his accomplishments ; and I could have gone on for ever, happy in his acquaintance, upon the terms on which I have now been so long enjoying it ; but little as I may be supposed to know of the world, I know that my mind is unsettled ; — that I have committed myself ; that his feelings towards me will undergo a change ; and that being conscious of an interest on my part, which ought not to exist, he — ”

" — Dearest Fanny," interrupted Emma, " indeed, indeed, he understands and feels exactly as he ought, and as you must wish him to feel. I fear I have incautiously alarmed you by repeating some of the expressions of affection and admiration, which, in the course of our conversation he made use of ; but is it not natural he should do so ? you candidly admit the gratification you have experienced in his society, and the admiration *you* feel for his conversation and accomplishments — why should he not reciprocate those feelings ? — Surely there is neither

sin nor shame in this.—Is there to be no such thing as friendship in the world?"

" You are too kind — too indulgent to your unhappy friend," said Mrs. Harbottle ; " you endeavour to soothe me into a belief of my total innocence in this affair — you think me innocent. I feel myself so ; but no *man*, I am sure, can be persuaded that a woman would complain of her unhappiness, and appeal to the friend of her husband in her distress, without some object ; and then — oh, would to Heaven I had died before I had spoken those words!"

" Fanny, I must insist upon your calming your feelings," said Miss Lovell :—" they are needlessly excited.—The delay of these three days — however much I may lament it, — because in your present temper of mind, it will, I know, annoy and worry you — is, in fact, a matter of no consequence : — he sees the propriety of parting."

" There," said Fanny, " there, Emma, you have said it ; as I talk of my husband's suspicions, *he* admits the propriety of parting from *me*. When were *we* — when were our names before associated ? when before were our interests spoken of in common ? No, no, my happiness is gone for ever. I trust in his honour implicitly and confidently ; but to be obliged to trust any man, except my husband — even in thought — oh, no, no, no !"

" Dearest Fanny," said Emma, " I can enter into all your views. I respect your principles, I admire your delicacy ; but for his sake and your own, strive against these feelings. He is pledged to me not to seek, and you have resolved not to permit, any thing like a conversation apart with him — surely you can treat him like any other visiter."

" I fear not, Emma," said Mrs. Harbottle ; " the consciousness that I have betrayed a feeling towards my husband, such as I expressed to him, must always keep him in my thoughts ; and the confidence I reposed in him will ever be associated in my memory with himself ; but with this I will struggle — and, by the help of Providence, I will conquer it."

This conversation (which brought the ladies to the gate of Dale Cottage) gave Emma more uneasiness than any communication she had yet had with her friend; for, from its tone and character, she almost feared that Fanny had been deceiving herself as to her real feelings towards Harvey; and that, in point of fact, she even began to repent of having made the *éclat*, by letting her friend into her confidence, and deputing her to break off her association with him.

It was, however, but a transient alarm. Fanny's was a situation of difficulty as well as delicacy: she had acted upon the impulse of feeling — she had decided according to the dictates of prudence — she had resolved upon her course — she had followed it; and yet, we must allow her to have been in some degree blamelessly influenced by a gentler sentiment towards one of whom she thought so highly, and with whom she did not believe herself capable of conversing collectedly upon the topic nearest to her heart.

That she was right as to the effect the whole affair was likely to produce upon Charles, we have already seen; and it certainly seemed something like a strange interposition of fate that Harbottle should so peremptorily refuse his consent to Harvey's departure. So, however, it was, and the three days' trial had not yet begun. Those three days in France nicknamed, in the jargon of the modern revolutionists, "*glorious*," were scarcely more eventful to a nation, than the coming Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday were to the house of Harbottle.

In answer to the enquiries of the fair pedestrians at Dale Cottage, they were informed, that Lady Frances was gone to Smedley, a romantic village in the neighbourhood.

"To be sure," said Emma, "I might have saved you your visit, Fanny; for my father told me that Captain Sheringham was going to drive Lady Frances over there."

"The Captain is not gone with my lady, Miss," said the footman, "her ladyship is driving herself."

"Shall I leave the message, Emma," said Fanny, "or shall I send a note when we get home?"

The difficulty did not appear insurmountable in either

way, and it was altogether overcome by Mrs. Harbottle's performing both evolutions, leaving a verbal invitation to dinner *then*, and "reminding" her ladyship and the Captain with a note afterwards.

"Do you know, Fanny," said Miss Lovell, as they were returning to the hall, "I begin to have some doubts as to the evenness of Captain Sheringham's temper, there was a sort of sullenness almost amounting to ill-nature in his manner to me last night, which ——"

"Ought," interrupted her friend, "to have been in the highest degree satisfactory to you; that is, if he happen to be as dear to you as I believe him to be: he was in an agony of despair and jealousy during the whole of your conversation with Charles; and whatever doubts I had before of the serious character of his attachment to you, the conduct of which you are now affecting to complain set them completely at rest."

"Our long absence," said Emma, "must have had a strange effect; but I heed neither Mr. Harbottle's jests nor Captain Sheringham's frowns. I know I was doing a duty to my friend — that it was a painful one, I admit; and, as matters have since turned out, perhaps it would have been as well that that conversation had not taken place."

In order to avoid the society of the now *dreaded* Harvey, Mrs. Harbottle suggested visiting the Parsonage, and making a stay there during the period of the day usually appropriated to luncheon at the hall. The expected visitors would not make their appearance much before dressing time; and as for any ride or drive, which the ladies might propose, it would be impossible to decline the attendance of Harvey and the Squire, or most probably Harvey alone, if they encountered them before the carriage or horses were ordered.

This arrangement was made — they proceeded to the Rectory; and having thence despatched her note to Lady Frances and the Captain, Mrs. Harbottle remained with Miss Lovell till it was time for her to return home, and at a period when she was pretty sure of not meeting either her husband or his friend.

In due time came the "pleasant," "agreeable people," to enjoy whose society, Charles was made prisoner. Three hard-headed fox-hunters, with rosy cheeks and thick scrubbing-brush-looking hair — one of them with a fair delicate bride, and a brown boisterous sister — a silent man with a talkative wife — and a deaf lawyer from the next market-town. They were the dearest friends Harbottle had, out of Binford, that is to say, they were (like his more immediate neighbours) his creatures, his satellites, and he could rule and command them with unqualified potentiality ; and therefore it was, that he desired Lady Frances should be present to witness the exercise of his authority. The gratification of this passion for social superiority gave an air of swaggering authority to his manners, and his *dicta* were upon such occasions fulminated in a tone of authority which he scarcely knew how to subdue, when he was placed, in what to him was the painful situation of being in the society of his superiors. It was a shrewd remark, and made by a shrewd person, that the man who loves to be the highest of his company, will, probably, in time sink to be the lowest of it.

It would be vain, as it is unnecessary, to describe the feelings of Fanny and Charles during the painful half-hour before dinner ; he endeavoured to make conversation with the sportsmen, and Fanny tried to be more than ordinarily lively and chatty with the ladies. Harbottle was in high spirits, and Emma Lovell in high beauty.

" Fan, dear," said the Squire, " is the carriage gone down for the Sheringhams? 'gad, it's late. Breguer has just struck seven, second bell has rung, dinner serving, never wait. As I say, Snagthorpe, what's the use of giving five hundred a year to a cook, if the man has not fair play? In dining and fighting, eh! — time's the word. Capital cook he is, as, indeed, I believe all of you here know pretty well. Ha! ha! ha!"

" Lady Frances Sheringham," was announced — Mrs. Harbottle rose to meet and receive her ; and Emma's lily cheek flushed, and her snowy bosom heaved, and her heart beat, as her ladyship advanced. Anxious to know whether the clouds of the preceding evening had vanished from

George Sheringham's features, and resolved, under the opinion of Mrs. Harbottle, to let the sunshine of her eyes dissipate any slight gloom which might remain, if she perceived encouraging symptoms of a favourable change in the weather on his part, the timid girl looked round to observe the expression of the gallant Captain's countenance.

But if her heart palpitated then — and it *did* — and her cheek flushed, and her bosom heaved, what happened, when Lady Frances had reached the middle of the drawing room, and before she had received the “*accolade*” of Mrs. Harbottle, Emma saw the door closed, and saw no Captain George Augustus Frederick Sheringham make his appearance to be shone upon.

For a moment she fancied that he had turned to speak to some of the guests in the other drawing-room ; but no, he was not there.

“Lady Frances,” said the Squire, “where is the Captain ?”

“Why, upon my word, Mr. Harbottle,” said her ladyship, “I know just as little as you do : he promised to drive me to Smedley, but when the pony phaeton came, he was ‘absent without leave,’ as he would himself say. I therefore drove myself, and when I returned, I found a note from him, saying that he had received a letter which held out hopes of employment ; and that, anxious not to lose a moment, he had started without waiting to take leave of me, or, as he adds, of ‘any body else.’ He tells me I shall hear in a day or two, and the servants think he is gone to town. *Voila l'histoire.*”

More comforts for the company. Emma saw in an instant the cause of Sheringham's sudden departure. The gloom of the preceding evening had, by the unforeseen events of the morning, been converted into anger ; and the jealousy, which had no doubt been smouldering throughout the night, had burst into a flame, on his finding his imaginary rival seated at the Rector's breakfast-table.

Fanny, of course, felt the same conviction ; her eyes met Emma's, — their looks were mutually intelligible.

“Gone, is he ?” said the Squire ; “now that's all your fault, Miss Emma ; that's just the thing, two strings to

your bow, or, as my friend Snagthorpe here would say, two beaux in your string. You thought to worry him last night, by carrying off Master Charles ; and now, by Jove, he is gone, ha ! ha ! ha ! — Broken hearted, I dare say, my lady. Ha ! ha ! ha ! ”

“ I really believe,” said Lady Frances, “ that he is yet safe and heart-whole, not that I am in his confidence ; for although he is somewhat addicted to flirting, he has not got a grain of sentiment in his composition. I fancy his present object is a ship rather than a wife.”

Her ladyship, whose opinion of the cause of her son’s departure was not entirely at variance with that of the Squire, delivered these last few words in a marked manner, and a particular tone, looking Emma full in the face, who, conscious of her ladyship’s meaning, was ready to sink through the floor. How long she might have been able to battle against her feelings, it is impossible to say ; luckily the announcement of dinner put an end to the struggle.

After a two hours’ display of boisterous mirth and empty ostentation, the ladies quitted the dining-room, and left the sportsmen to the enjoyment of their social pleasures ; of which, however, the fair creatures were still made in some degree partakers, for the shouts, and huzzas, and tally-hos which marked the admiration of the gentlemen for the different toasts and sentiments which emanated from the Squire, in the chair, made the house ring again, and echoed through the hall to the more peaceful recesses of the drawing-room.

Coffee having been twice or three times ordered, and as many times countermanded, and “ more claret ” having been as many times called for, it appeared to some of the quietest members of the community time to join the ladies ; and accordingly the deaf lawyer led the way, followed by Charles Harvey, who, though pledged to Emma to seek no private conversation with Mrs. Harbottle, felt that he was not pledged to remain any longer where he was. The advanced guard was soon followed by the main *corps d'armée*, and the rear brought up by Harbottle himself, whose appearance, on his entrance to the drawing-

room, convinced his anxious lady that he had arrived at that state in which most of all she dreaded to see him, when his mind, such as it was, was just brought to a state of oscillation between outrageous merriment and savage rage, and when the balance was so equal, that a grain in either scale would predominate. In these humours he was habituated to the use of what he imagined raillery ; and if before dinner he had acquired an idea (or as he used to call it, a notion) of any thing which might be going on, and in which his associates might be engaged, he would in the evening, after his copious libations, which were to his mind what varnish is to a picture, and brought out all its beauties or deformities, as the case might be, invariably try back upon the graver conversations of the earlier part of the day, and bring forward again all the arguments he had previously adopted, and the observations he had previously made, but with a tenfold strength of language.

Knowing this peculiarity, Fanny was convinced that Miss Lovell would come under his particular observation the moment they met ; and, moreover, was she convinced that the turn of the conversation, while tormenting to Emma, would probably induce a quarrel with Lady Frances, who had expressed herself after dinner in no very equivocal terms as to her views and intentions with respect to her son. To these apprehensions on the part of Mrs. Harbottle was superadded the impossibility, in case the conversation should take that turn, of avoiding a discussion upon the conservatory scene, which must necessarily place Charles and herself in an equally embarrassing position.

" What are you two doing in this corner ? " said Harbottle, addressing Lady Frances and Mrs. Snagthorpe, who were playing at *écarté*.

" Why," said Lady Frances, " — this — lady (her name was impracticable) and I have been endeavouring to while away time, which I suppose has been flying with you, till you joined us."

" Ah ! " said the Squire, looking vacantly, or as he meant it, wisely at the table, " for my part I do like wine, and I don't like cards — I don't understand cards. I never play for pleasure, and I won't play for money ;

winning a hundred or two pounds would be no object to me, and losing half as much would put me in a passion."

"Yes," said her ladyship, "as poor Mr. Sheringham used to say, playing high is purchasing anxiety at a thousand pounds an hour."

"Come," said the Squire, "let's all do something : has every body seen the house ? If they haven't, I'll show it ; — Hollis get candles ; and — come, Lady Frances, I'll be hanged if you have seen my house yet."

"Well, let me finish my *partie*," said her ladyship.

"*Partie !* — oh, that's French," said the Squire ; "I hate French, and I hate every thing but having my own way : — come, who's for up stairs ?"

Some of those who had, and some who had not visited the galleries and passages of his mansion, followed the Squire in his progress.

Fanny and Emma hoped that Lady Frances would have done a *douce violence* to her feelings, and joined the exploring party ; — but no — she remained at her *écarté* : and as Mrs. Harbottle was doomed to be Mrs. Snagthorpe's adviser, the two ladies most interested in passing events had an opportunity of communicating their ideas or opinions.

Emma Lovell, it must be confessed, was in a worse position than her friend. Fanny had chalked out a line of conduct, she had followed it, and however much a few hours delay might militate against her entire tranquillity, or cause her some transient uneasiness, her point was carried, her object was gained, and she would at the end of the week be restored, if not to perfect repose, at least to the comparative comfort of feeling conscious that she had acted prudently and honourably, and that, however great the sacrifice might be which she had made, the result which she proposed in making it had been secured.

But with Emma the case was wholly and entirely different. Secluded from the world, living in the quiet fulfilment of every duty, filial and social, in the small circle of which she was the pride and ornament, her thoughts and wishes strayed not beyond the boundaries of the fertile valley in which her father had taken up his rest ; and her

gentle mind, unused to the excitements of gaiety or the allurements of flattery, full of tenderness and kindness, had received with unaffected pleasure the attentions and devotion of such a man as Sheringham. That he was charmed with *her* we know; for in his character and disposition there were a frankness and ingenuousness which rendered it impossible for him to conceal his feelings, even if he had thought it essential to endeavour to do so.

Emma, unschooled in the world's ways, was equally incapable of duplicity; and thus either of them seemed confident in the affection of the other. Although a word of love had never been exchanged between them, Emma, conscious of his regards, felt pleased and gratified; and he, almost assured by her manner that when the moment of declaration came, he should not be rejected, loved and lingered on, happy in her society, and delighted with the traits of excellence in her character, which were daily developing themselves.

What had *she* done?—Conscious as she felt herself that Sheringham always feared the rivalry of Charles Harvey, she had selected Charles as the partner of a protracted dialogue, apart from the rest of the society, which dialogue had terminated by his disappearance, and her assumption of a character, and for the first time in her life the enactment of a part, to disguise the real truth. She tested Sheringham's conduct by her own feelings; she reflected upon what *she* should have suffered if he had singled out some fair girl to devote himself to, for the evening, and abstract himself with, if at the end of a lengthened conversation they had parted evidently under the influence of strong feelings—thus it was she judged her own conduct; thus did she revolve the events of the preceding day, and coupling those with the occurrences of the morning at the Rectory, arrive at the resolution that she had behaved in a manner unjustifiable, because inexplicable, to the being of whose love for her she was conscious—a consciousness acquired, it must be confessed, by a process, the result of which was the incontrovertible certainty that *she* loved *him*.

“Here we are, here we are!” cried the Squire, dancing

into the drawing-room, followed by his group of equally merry friends — “that *écarté* not done yet — I say, Fan, dear Fan, let us do something till supper ; let's play blind-man's buff, hide and seek ; Miss Snagthorpe is all for a game.”

Here the burst of noise was terrific.

“ Hunt the slipper, any thing,” cried Harbottle ; “ What's to be had for fun, let's have ; what's to be had for money, we will have — ha ! ha ! ha !”

Here Lady Frances, having in vain attempted to stop her ears, laid down her cards, paid her points, and drawing on her glove retired to the sofa.

“ What shall it be, my lady ?” said the Squire, “ eh, hunt the slipper ; bless your old soul, you'd like it, I know you would — ha ! ha ! ha !”

“ Hide and seek,” cried the voices of several, who were convinced by the sinuosities of passages and difficult ascents and descents which they had just traversed, that the house was admirably calculated for that game.

“ So be it — so be it,” said Harbottle ; “ who shall hide ? — let's see — somebody who knows the house ought to hide first. Fan — Fan, you should hide — you and Charles Harvey — you two first. Come — where is he ? — Come, away with you ; stow yourselves away in some dark corner, and cry “ Whoop ! ” when we may follow — ha ! ha ! ha ! They've played at it a hundred times before, so we shall have old nick's work to catch them — ha ! ha ! ha !”

What was to be done ? Nothing but comply ; the least check to Harbottle's will, when in his present humour, would have produced something not very unlike a paroxysm of madness. Fanny, per force, obeyed — and Harvey, scarcely conscious of what he was doing, accompanied her to the hiding-place, according to her husband's directions.

They proceeded along the passages, and having ensconced themselves in a dark room, the door of which happened to be open — the signal was given, and the seekers set forth.

Charles had, involuntarily — unconsciously — taken Fanny's hand — it was as cold as ice, and shook fearfully.

"Good God!" said Charles, "what a situation to be thrown into, after what has occurred!" —

"For Heaven's sake, Charles," said Fanny, "remember your pledge — I — trust to your honour."

"One only word," replied Charles; "remember when I am gone —"

"No, no," said Fanny, "not one syllable — they are here — they are here!"

And, accordingly, the train of thoughtless ones swept by, making all the lobbies and staircases ring with their boisterous mirth as they passed the door. Fanny ran off, followed of course by Charles, to some other place of security from the mimic hunters.

Two minutes afterwards a third person quitted the room, which they had temporarily occupied, who had not been seen in it by either Charles or Fanny.

CHAPTER IX.

You think yourselves the finest gentlemen
When you are most to be despised and pitied;
Not monkeys can be more ridiculous!
Besides the infamy you must contract :
In the opinion of the good and wise,
As soon I'd choose a madman for a friend ;
You vomit secrets when o'ercharged with wine —
You often quarrel with the best of friends —
And she must be as bold as is a lioness
Who takes you for a husband. Drink, in short,
Provokes you to all folly, to all vice,
Till you become a nuisance to mankind.

SHADWELL

WHEN the next morning's sun awakened the Squire from his slumbers to a consciousness of existence, he felt as if, amidst the chaos of events and incidents of the preceding evening, he recollect ed having done a vast many foolish things, the precise nature or character of which, however, he could not establish at all to his satisfaction. He had

either said or done something outrageous to Lady Frances, and something excessively silly to Miss Snagthorpe, and had affronted Emma Lovell, and scolded his wife before her guests ; but as the detail of all his follies would not be by any means entertaining to the reader, we will leave him to the enjoyment of that sort of retrospective feeling, of having somehow committed himself the night before, which frequently worries a man in the morning, but which is never wrought to a much higher pitch than when he wakes to the certainty of having lost half his fortune before he went to sleep.

The only permanent sentiment in Mr. Harbottle's mind was resentment towards his unhappy Fanny. Upon what particular account he could not so well remember, but the point was established ; and, therefore, as she either was or seemed to be wrapped in peaceful slumber when her excellent spouse thought proper to bestir himself, he did not disturb her repose by enquiring into the cause of quarrel, or soliciting her forgiveness of his intemperance.

Not he ; his usual course after one of these exhibitions was to proceed silently, perhaps sullenly, to his dressing-room ; and having made his toilet without calling any servant to his assistance, go down stairs into his own room, and having loitered about, having no pursuit which led him to read or write — excepting, indeed, after the arrival of the post, to answer any business-letters which he might receive from his banker or his lawyer — generally stroll to the hall door, where, having inhaled some of the freshness of the morning, he used, if he fell in with his ancient serving-man, and now house-steward, Hollis, endeavour to learn from him such particulars of his own individual conduct on the preceding evening as in the whirl of his brain he had himself forgotten — and this he usually did with what he considered a prodigious deal of tact and dexterity.

It so happened upon the particular morning in question, that he encountered this man on his return from the breakfast parlour, whither he had been to inspect the preparations for the matin meal.

“ Hollis,” said the Squire, “ were you up when the

carriage came back from taking Lady Frances and Miss Lovell home?"

"Yes, sir," said Hollis: "it was about two o'clock."

"Pray, did I—I forget," said the Squire, "did I give the coachman any orders about having two carriages ready for the ladies to-day?"—

"I did not hear, sir," said Hollis; "but I'll send to the stables and enquire."

"No," said the Squire; "I'll go—myself—pray—did Lady Frances say she would come up and join the party, when she went away?"

"No, sir," said Hollis; "I understood her ladyship quite different from that. She seemed, I thought, in a great passion, and talking about something. I believe it was chiefly on account of something you said to her about the Captain and Miss Lovell, sir."

So much of this dialogue as the reader has yet overheard, will, perhaps, serve to show the familiar nature of the communications which frequently passed between this uncouth master and his long-tried servant. The sequel will, perhaps, enlighten the said reader somewhat farther.

"What!" said Harbottle, "did I joke my lady about that—and did Miss Lovell hear me?"

"Yes, to be sure she did, sir," said Hollis, "so did all the servants; for it was in the hall; and Miss Lovell seemed very much vexed and frightened."

"And was Mr. Harvey there? What did *he* say?" said Harbottle.

"I really don't know," said Hollis somewhat significantly; "I don't think Mr. Harvey *was* there—I think most likely he *was not*."

"Because," said Harbottle, continuing the conversation in his strange and unaccountable manner, "he is Miss Lovell's sweetheart, and is going off from us on her account."

"Indeed, sir," said Hollis, "I should not have thought that—however—I shan't be very sorry to see *his* back turned to this house."

"Why, Hollis?" said the Squire; "I know *I* shall be

very sorry : but when once a woman's in the case, there's an end of every thing ; so, if he must go, he must."

" *I say* nothing, sir," said Hollis, " but my belief is, that it would have been just as well if he never had come here."

" I dare say it might for him, poor fellow," replied the Squire carelessly, his thoughts not in the slightest degree directed into the channel to which his " excellent" domestic was endeavouring to invite them, and he turned away to visit the stables without suffering himself to be farther edified by his valuable retainer.

Fidelity in an ancient servant is most admirable and praiseworthy, and much to the credit of this Hollis would it have been if he could have saved his master from dis-honour, or his mistress from disgrace ; but truth must be told ; far from being the faithful steward that his master believed him to be, he was a mixture of baseness and dishonesty. Time had blanched his head, but his heart remained as black as ever. In his master, from the time of his coming of age, he had found the dupe of his artifices — the victim of his chicanery ; and when Harbottle married, Hollis felt that a mistress of the house would be a check upon his spoliations and misdoings. A prudent housekeeper, selected by an aunt of Mrs. Harbottle's, was placed in charge of the establishment ; and although the wasteful liberality, or rather reckless ostentation, of her husband experienced no great reduction by her exertions, yet method and order had, in some degree, been introduced into the establishment ; and when alone with him, abstracted from parties and visitors, Fanny's mild and cheering influence, which he thought it manly and spirited to deny and ridicule before strangers, won him to habits of regularity and an attention to his expenditure, which, lavish as it was, was at least reducible to account — a circumstance which, while Hollis reigned with absolute power, never had occurred ; and, then again, whenever she was able to interpose her persuasion between his desire to buy, at the recommendation of his favourite servant, objects which, like his pastile-burning dragons and his duck-mounted bagatelle-board, were neither useful nor ornamental, she

applied herself to do so, securing a solid satisfaction for her husband at the price of a rooted and inveterate hatred from his creature.

In the whole heart and disposition of Fanny, there was nothing that was not kind and amiable, affectionate and charitable. She had lost her mother so early in life as to be unconscious of the bereavement, and had been educated under the care of an aunt, the sister of her father; and, when chance threw Harbottle in her way, she was every thing that man could seek or desire in a wife; modest and unaffected, accomplished and beautiful; gay without levity, and sensitively alive to every right feeling without the slightest particle of prudery; her countenance, animated with intelligence and ever-varying expression, was the index of a genuine, pure, and unsophisticated mind. In her manners there was a winning sweetness, an inherent gracefulness, which courts may improve but cannot give; and while the joyous smile of harmless pleasure played on her dimpled cheeks, there was ever beaming round her the pure radiancy of virtue to sanctify her beauty.

And this was the being whose happiness, whose fame, whose very existence, perhaps, was to be endangered by the malicious insinuations of a demon in human shape! Scarce that — not because he felt anxious for either his master's honour or happiness, but in order, if he could, to overthrow the regularity of his establishment, and bring back the chaos which had, in other days, produced such profitable results to him, and out of which he now proposed to realise a handsome competence for a ragamuffin son and a tawdry daughter.

This worthy domestic had long been seeking some opportunity to poison his master's mind; and the innocent playfulness of Fanny's disposition, misconstrued by the low and vicious imagination of Hollis into something like levity and impropriety, induced him constantly to watch her actions, in hopes of fastening upon her some indiscretion of sufficient importance to awaken his master's doubts; for he had cunning enough to understand at least one of the minds with which he had to deal, and he knew that if once he could lead the Squire to suspect, in the slightest de-

gree, the rest of the game would be easily played by his own violence of temper, which, if it led to no other consequences, would, in all probability, bring about a separation between him and his lady; but the sneaking spy had watched in vain, and listened fruitlessly — nothing could he discover in the conduct or character of his mistress which malice could misrepresent into impropriety, until, like music to his attentive ears, did he hear his lady's maid detail the history of the note of which she had been the bearer from Charles.

This little episode in the family history, to which a most unjust colouring had been given by the flippancy of Mrs. Devon, was quite sufficient as the first stone of his fabric; and, as if the evil genius of poor Fanny had been at work against her, he happened accidentally — really accidentally — to be passing through the room in which she and Charles took refuge from the “*seekers*,” in their innocent game, and merely stopped to see what might happen when he found them run in. What he then heard made a valuable addition to the scanty supply of matter for impeachment already in his possession, and furnished ample materials for the first story, which he intended to raise upon his slender foundation.

When Harbottle returned to the house and met his assembled friends at the breakfast table, his anxiety to know if he had really misconducted himself seriously towards Lady Frances was rather whetted than allayed by the observations of Hollis upon their separation in the evening. Mrs. Harbottle, as the ingenuous servant had said, was not present at the party, and could, therefore, give him but little consolation; but Snagthorpe, who had attended them to the door, and escorted Miss Lovell to the carriage, afforded him some information which was any thing but satisfactory.

“ I must admit,” said the sporting Snagthorpe, “ that you did certainly hit her ladyship hard — you talked to her of the vanity of birth, and the vice of pride. How the conversation took that particular turn, I do not presume to know — so it was — and when she was telling us the history of something that had occurred at a party in London,

you told her that a large party seemed to you to be a general combination of a vast number of people to make each other uncomfortable, and ended by saying, that nobody but a fool or a pickpocket could enjoy a crowd."

"Ah," said Harbottle, "but as her ladyship is neither a pickpocket nor a fool, that could not offend her. Ha ! ha ! ha !"

"But then," continued the jovial sportsman, "you told her that Miss Lovell, the Parson's Daughter, was too good for her son, the Captain ; and you believed, after she had rejected Mr. Harvey for his sake, that her ladyship had packed him off to his quality friends to be kept out of harm's way."

"The deuce I did!" echoed the Squire; "did you hear me say *that*, Charles? Ha! ha! ha!"

"No," replied Harvey, "I — was not in the hall at the time."

"And what said she in return?" said the Squire.

"Why," continued Snagthorpe, feeling his details extremely well received by the party, who were convulsed with laughter during the showing up; "why, her ladyship said, that if Miss Lovell had given up Mr. Harvey for her son's sake, there *was* a lady of your acquaintance who did not seem inclined to give him up for any body's sake."

"Why, what did she mean?" said Harbottle.

It was a "merry jest," a "righte pleasaunte conceite." Poor Snagthorpe, though jocose, never fancied, as how indeed should he, what Lady Frances really and maliciously meant, for certainly the particularly reserved conduct of Charles and Fanny towards each other since the arrival of the new visitors was very unlikely to lead him to suspect that the mistress of the house was actually the object of her noble guest's attack.

"What does she mean, Charles?" said Harbottle.

Charles acted chameleon to perfection, and varied his colour prodigiously.—Fanny turned crimson.

"I — I can't think," said Charles.

"Do you know any of his secrets, Fan?" said the Squire to his wife, who luckily was sitting with her back to the light.

"Oh! not I," replied she.

"She could not mean Miss Eaglesfield," said the Squire to himself.—"A lady of *my* acquaintance. I'll go after breakfast to have it out with her — ha! ha! ha! and what said poor Emma all this time? — upon my life I never will drink punch after supper again. Ha! ha! ha!"

"Mr. Harvey," said Miss Snagthorpe, who thought it necessary to play her part in the slip-slop conversation, "must surely be conscious who the devoted damsel is."

"I am not aware," said Harvey, "I assure you."

"I don't care a fig about Lady Frances," said Harbottle; "to be sure there was no necessity for affronting her; but I am sorry about poor Emma, because I know it will vex her, and though she did throw you over, Charles, ——"

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Snagthorpe, the fox-hunter's pretty little delicate wife, "you really are too bad, Mr. Harbottle: if there is any truth in your story, you should spare Mr. Harvey, and if none, you should spare the young lady."

"Oh," said Charles, "I am proof against his raillery. I admit every thing, which is the surest way of avoiding discussion."

"No, you don't," said Miss Snagthorpe. "You deny your knowledge of the lady of Mr. Harbottle's acquaintance, who is not disposed to give you up for any body."

Never did this Patagonian Miss seem half so frightful to Fanny or to Charles as when she brought this little bit of satire to bear.

"I find," said Charles, "when the ladies declare war against me, I have no safety but in flight."

Saying which, he rose from the table, — so did Snagthorpe and one or two others who had finished their breakfast. Harbottle, with a certain degree of good nature, into which he had been brought by a consciousness of his misbehaviour the night before, walked up to his wife's chair, and in a tone of endearment half whispered in her ear, "What do you think Lady Frances really *did* mean about Charles?"

"How should I be able to tell?" said Fanny, who felt

her cheeks burn and her heart ache, as she condescended so to equivocate in an answer to her husband, as that she might avoid telling a falsehood while she yet denied the truth.

" Well, Mrs. Snagthorpe," cried Harbottle, turning from Fanny, quite satisfied with her ignorance, " to-day Fanny will take you over and show you the fishing cottage I have built, and we will order luncheon there — and you shall go in the britscka. Snagthorpe, you and I will ride — who goes in the phaeton? — Harvey, drive some of the ladies, that is, if your ravenous invisible will permit you. Ha ! ha ! ha ! — I think you 'll like my britscka, Mrs. Snagthorpe — Hobson — completest carriage in the world — cost me a mint of money — but as I say, what does it signify ? Ha ! ha ! ha ! However, I must go down to the Parsonage, make my peace with Emma, and call at Dale Cottage, have it out with my lady, and ask her here again to dinner."

" Indeed," said Fanny, " Mr. Harbottle, I think you had better not invite her again : in all probability she will decline seeing you if what they tell us happened really did occur ; and, at all events, I don't think the friends now with us are exactly suited to her ; and, besides —"

" Psha ! nonsense !" said Harbottle ; " not suited to her ! — if my dinners, and my carriages, and my comforts are suited to her, my company is suited to her. I shall break her into *my* ways."

" I would much rather she did not come," said Fanny, who, for reasons which she could not divulge, felt the strongest anxiety not again to be thrown into the society of one who, professing kindness, and friendship, and affection for her, could, in a moment of irritation, however savagely excited, evince to her husband a suspicion of the impropriety of her conduct, in a declaration which, however groundless in fact, clearly established two points — one, that her ladyship believed her dear friend actually guilty ; and the other, that, so believing, she did not hesitate to betray her on the first colourable opportunity.

" *I* would rather she *should* come," said the Squire. " I do not choose my friends to suppose that I am to be

whistled on and off like a dog, by these beggarly lords and ladies :— come she shall :— I am vexed about Emma— but I shall press her to come too.”

“ I fear it will be difficult to succeed in your invitation to her,” said Fanny, “ after your declaration with respect to her position relatively to Captain Sheringham. I suspect enough must have passed in their way home last night between her, poor girl, and the Captain’s mother, to render it little desirable to either party to meet again. Feelings like hers cannot so easily be soothed —”

“ Feelings !” exclaimed the Squire, snapping his fingers, “ fiddledee about feelings — depend upon it in this world the only way to get on, is to put your feelings in your pocket, and the less room there is in it to stow them away there the better.”

“ You do yourself injustice,” said Fanny ; “ your feelings are just as strong as any body’s.”

“ I grant you, Fan,” replied the husband, “ when I am put upon — sneered at — ridiculed — injured — deceived — that I can feel, and pretty sharply too ; but I should think myself a great fool to care about what is said between friends, as I call all of us here — hard words break no bones — do they, Tom ! Ha ! ha ! ha !”

These last words were accompanied by a tremendous slap on the back of our sporting friend Snagthorpe, which made him stagger again.

“ No, no,” cried the astounded Nimrod ; “ but hard thumps do, Harbottle.”

Fanny followed her inexorable husband, and kept entreating him not to persevere in his invitation to Lady Frances — but in vain. If she came, she anticipated all that she should have to undergo beyond her own private feelings as regarded her ladyship’s suspicions and malignity. Constant references to Harvey and his incognita favourite would lead to accusations and vindications intended to be jocose, but which would be daggers to her, and would, in all probability, betray Harvey (who was no match for Lady Frances) into some dilemma which might end in the most serious results.

The die, however, was cast, and nothing could save poor

Fanny from the rack which was preparing for her but the wounded pride of Lady Frances ; and from a closer acquaintance with her ladyship, Mrs. Harbottle began to believe that, in spite of the dignified tone which she had assumed on her first arrival at Binford, her magnificence had so far adapted itself to circumstances, that she preferred the luxuries of the hall, gratis, to the delicacies of the cottage even at a small charge ; indeed, it appeared by her words and actions, that although she did not hesitate to make war upon her neighbours on the slightest provocation, one of the leading principles of her tactics was that of foraging upon the enemy. The difficulty of the case to Fanny was this : — immediately after breakfast they were to start on the expedition to the Fishing Cottage, and Harbottle, who was first going to the Rectory and Dale Cottage, was to join them there. They would not meet before their departure on the excursion, and she could not, therefore, know whether the Squire's invitation was accepted or not, until it was too late to make any arrangements to avoid its effects.

She felt convinced that if it were, it would be impossible for her to support the presence of Harvey during her ladyship's visit — she foresaw all the consequences of his being of the party — the next day he was positively to go to London — she determined if she could ascertain Lady Frances's answer to be in the affirmative, to beg him at all events, and at the hazard even of affronting Harbottle, to take his departure that afternoon before dinner. But then her wish upon that point must be expressed to Charles himself ; therefore, before they quitted the Hall on their trip, she sought him in the breakfast-parlour — he had left it ; she looked into the conservatory — he was not there ; she lingered, hesitated — she could not make up her mind to get ready for her departure until she had secured his absence from dinner.

Harbottle was now actually gone — no time was to be lost — the carriages were coming round — Fanny crossed the hall — the library door was open — she looked in, and there saw the object at once of her search and of her avoidance. He had entered the room by a door at the other

end of it, which led again into the drawing-rooms, and was passing through it. When he saw her in quest of him, Harvey started.

"For Heaven's sake, Charles," said she, "listen a moment. You know what Lady Frances said last night — *he* is gone to invite her here to dinner to-day. Hear me — if she came, and you were here, I should die. Cruel, deceitful woman ! What I have to ask — " here fear, anxiety, and a thousand other feelings, almost stopped her utterance.

"Speak, Fanny," said Charles — "direct me how to act."

"You are to go to-morrow," continued she, not much less affected than he evidently was ; "that is your promise to *him*, not to me. You were pledged to go yesterday — let me entreat of you go to-day — go — make any excuse — leave a note — do not see him — you will be over-persuaded — God forgive me — I think I shall die — go — I could not endure your presence — you could not bear the jests and follies which they would commit — I am convinced we should betray ourselves."

WE!!!

"If the struggle kills me, it shall be done," said Charles : "you see me no more."

"Heaven bless you," said Fanny. "Farewell, then — no — no — no — hush, I hear them coming — let me go this way — my eyes will betray me. Farewell, Charles — farewell ; once more, God bless you !"

She rushed from him to the other door, which was ajar : she pushed it open to pass out, and discovered — Hollis listening.

CHAPTER X.

— If powers divine
 Behold our human actions (as they do),
 I doubt not then but innocence shall make
 False accusation blush, and tyranny
 Tremble at patience. You, my lord, best know
 Who least will seem to do so; my past life
 Hath been as innocent, as chaste, as true,
 As I am now unhappy.

SHAKSPEARE.

AND what may have happened in the meanwhile to our excellent young friend, Captain George Augustus Frederick Sheringham, who, it seems, had suddenly adopted the rarely used manœuvre in English nauticals of running away?

To be deceived by a girl of the world, with whom a man has been playing the same game as herself, and to be defeated in a running fight of flirtation, or outwitted in a case of coquetry, may be unpleasant at the moment, because being deceived and defeated in any thing is far from agreeable; but the pang is a thousand times more severe when the object of our affections happens to be such a being as Emma Lovell. The retiring modesty of manner, the soul-fraught tenderness of feeling, the gentleness of expression, the excellence of purpose, and the purity of thought which distinguish such a being amidst a thousand, seem so many sureties for sincerity and truth.

To be discarded by such a one as this, is the bitterest of all human mortifications, because either a man has been deceived wilfully by her original assumption of appearances, which were but superficial, or she has discovered something in his character and qualities so much at variance with what could be acceptable to such a being (supposing her sincere), as to have induced her, upon acquaintance and reflection, to withdraw herself from an intimacy for which at first she had no disinclination.

That Emma was attached to Harvey, Sheringham had no doubt — that their conversation in the conservatory had ended in her acceptance of his offer he was equally certain; first, from having seen him *planté* at breakfast at her

father's the next morning ; secondly, from her message, openly delivered to him by a common footman ; and, thirdly, by their manner and earnestness, in the walk which they subsequently took to the hall, after his departure from the Parsonage.

It would be impossible to describe the sort of ebullition by which the gallant captain's heart and mind were agitated in his saunter homewards. He walked slowly for one minute — rapidly for two — then he would stop — some tree, some bush, some stile, some object which he passed, brought to his recollection a word — a look — a smile of Emma — ay, a smile — for she *had* smiled on him “many a time and oft” as they had walked along that very path. Then he doubted — then he feared — then he defied — laughed at his own weakness, and whistled ; as if, like Othello, he could

“ Whistle her off, and let her down the wind
To prey at fortune.”

But that humour lasted only for a moment — he stopped again — stamped on the ground with vexation and anger. Should he call out Harvey ? Why ? — she had favoured — had accepted him. Should he see — propose to her — he never had done so, and had no more right to her affections, nor hold over them, than any other of the gallant commanders in his Majesty's royal navy. Why did he complain then of her preference of Charles ? if he so much dreaded the result, why had he not anticipated his offer ? He would go back — he would speak to her father — he would do something on the instant that should decide the point. He turned hesitatingly round to put this scheme into execution, when he beheld Miss Emma Lovell leaning on the arm of Mr. Charles Harvey, proceeding by the nearest way from the Parsonage to the park-gates, — leaning, too, with a decided pressure of one arm, while, with the other, she appeared to be enforcing by action some argument of importance, with the strongest energy and emphasis, which he appeared to receive with marked attention, animated by occasional gestures, indicative of avowals and protestations.

Away went all his resolutions ; for all the hopes on

which those resolutions were founded were by this horrid vision blighted — it was too clear — the thing was settled, and nothing remained for him but instantly to quit the scene of his delusion and defeat. Knowing, however, exactly the turn of his lady mother's mind, with respect to his matrimonial proceedings generally, and more especially with his proceedings connected with this particular speculation, he resolved to attribute his departure to some other cause, which he should state in a note to her ladyship, and "cut and run," without leaving her any clue by which she could discover the place of his destination, so that he might for the present avoid any of those lectures upon morals, manners, and matrimony, which her ladyship was much in the habit of writing upon certain sheets of shining, musk-smelling wove paper, and despatching to him sometimes hebdomadally, and at other times even diurnally.

This resolution taken, the Captain ordered his servant to pack a portmanteau, and forthwith betook himself on foot to the turning by the Binford finger-post, where having waited some twenty minutes, he was picked up by a London coach, in which (having sent his man back) he and his portmanteau were speedily bestowed.

But while we are bound to relate the progress of the flying lover, it is equally our duty to cast one glance upon her whom he had left — left under an impression — hastily, yet not altogether harshly formed — of her falsehood and heartlessness. Painful and agitating as his sudden departure, so caused, was to Sheringham, what were its effects upon *him*, compared with those which it produced upon Emma !

Man, proud man, as he may well be called, as far as human pride is concerned, loves — fondly, devotedly loves; his days are occupied by thoughts of *her* whom he adores — his nights, when not sleepless, are passed in dreams of *her*: but then, his occupations — the toils of business, practice at the bar, attendance in parliament — politics, if a statesman — war, if a soldier — his pursuits, if professional — his diversified amusements, if a sportsman — society — wine — cards — dice — all these excitements are at hand, and as choice or necessity leads or draws him to

their adoption, each is acceptable and accepted — but a woman, who loves — a being like Emma, who had never loved before — whose whole mind, whose pursuits, whose thoughts, whose sentiments, whose character, are propertied by the one, one engrossing passion, is — how differently placed !

Never was being more exemplary than she of whom I speak. Her constant attention to the wants and sorrows of her father's poor parishioners — her schools — her little housewifery, by which the means of the cottagers' family were to be increased during the winter months ; her anxiety and readiness to forward and support whatever could be advantageous to the helpless infant or the aged sufferer were — not unequalled — for, praise be to Heaven, there are many like her — but they were warm and energetic, far beyond that which common observers would expect from a being so mild, so modest, so gentle, and so unassuming.

In those, it is true, she found a constant resource ; and, as the almoner of her excellent father's bounty, her mornings were regularly passed, previously to her almost daily visits to Fanny. Once only had the uniformity of her visits to the poor been interrupted ; once only had she failed in enquiring after the health and comfort of her pensioners — and that once was on the morning after Sheringham abruptly left Binford, and after the conversation which passed in the carriage between her and Lady Frances.

Lady Frances, who, up to the moment the Squire volunteered his remarks upon her son's absence, really had no suspicion how very much Emma was concerned in his going, was, by the observations Harbottle made (coupled with the agitated expression of Miss Lovell's countenance), satisfied that there actually *was* a connection between the Captain's departure and the young lady's apparent coldness on the preceding evening. Her game, therefore, was to be played — brief as the time allowed her was — during the *trajet* from the Hall to the Rectory (her ladyship insisting upon setting Miss Lovell down before the carriage took her home, although the ordinary course would have been

Dale Cottage first, Parsonage next) ; and, accordingly, she began her skirmishing before they had left the park.

"What an extraordinary creature Mr. Harbottle is!" said her ladyship, "isn't he, my dear?"

"He certainly *is* very odd," said Miss Lovell ; "but at this time of the evening nobody accustomed to his society ought to mind what he says."

"Why," said her ladyship, "to tell you the truth, - my love, I never do, at any time ; if I did I never should enter his house after once leaving it : there are such strange persons in the world that it is really necessary to accommodate our feelings and sentiments to the things we meet in society ; but I am sure that you, like myself, are quite *au fait* upon such matters, and regard the idle babbling of men, particularly those who indulge in that horrible and now exploded vice of drinking, as mere nonsense."

"I assure you, Lady Frances," said Emma, "that I very much regret to see the odious habit of which you speak, gain, rather than decrease, with Mr. Harbottle."

"Why," continued her ladyship, "it really is a matter of very little importance to me what people do, if they have just enough method in their madness not to involve *other* people. Now my poor son, Captain Sheringham, whose name he so coarsely coupled with yours —you know that sort of thing is quite unpardonable. The fact is — of course you will not mention this, my dear Miss Lovell — George *is* gone to London upon particular business. I don't choose to submit all my family history to Mr. Harbottle, and therefore I affected ignorance of his movements ; but the real truth is, as you must see. George —I don't mean to say that he has any very great chance of a peerage, because there are two or three between him and the title in his poor dear father's family — but there it is. Well — then you know with my connections, and the sincere affection which my brother, Lord Pevensey, has always evinced for him — and, indeed, I may say his own personal claims — it *is* natural, that, wishing, as I know he does wish, to marry, he should be anxious to mix a little more than he can here in his own immediate sphere — I am sure he is

extremely happy at Binford ; and, as a son, I have every possible reason to praise and admire him ; and I know, that in any settlement for life *my* wish would be a command with him. But still you see, my love, he feels himself buried in this sort of place ; and as there *is* a person — of course all this is *entre nous* — to whom he has been almost since childhood attached, he thinks that an opportunity has offered of pressing his suit in that quarter, which may, to be sure, be rejected — Heaven knows — but *that* he has in confidence explained to me to be the cause of his sudden flight."

" We shall miss him very much," said Emma, " in our little excursions." It was lucky it was dark, and that the lamps of the carriage, like those of all well-regulated carriages, threw no light inwards.

" I," said Lady Frances, who never in the whole course of her acquaintance with Emma had spoken one half so much before — " I confess — but that of course, my dear child, is also in confidence — I expect his *projet* to come to nothing ; for, amiable and excellent, and I *may* add, noble, as dear Catherine is — Catherine is her name — she has nothing in the way of fortune — absolutely nothing — and, of course, poor George, who has himself nothing in the world but his half-pay, cannot afford to marry a girl without fortune ; and what I grieve at most is, that if Pevensey, or some of them, do not make a little struggle now, the poor dear girl will be so unhappy — for she dotes upon him — and," added her ladyship, as the carriage drove in to the Rectory-gate, " I happen to know he is just as fond of *her*."

They stopped at the house : Lady Frances took leave of Emma with the most affectionate tenderness ; bid her take care not to risk her safety by putting her " dear foot " into a little puddle before the door : " wrap yourself up, my love," *i. e.* in stepping out of the carriage into the hall. " Good-by, dear ; remember me kindly to papa ;" — and so on — and thence her ladyship proceeded to Dale Cottage.

Oh ! if these plotters could but really comprehend how very short a way their efforts go against a mind like Emma Lovell's, they would save themselves all the trouble of what

I believe Miss Edgeworth calls "Policising." (If I am wrong in the word, I have to apologise to that admirable authoress, for I use it only from memory.) Poor Lady Frances, painted and pencilled, and petrified with horror at the insight into her own family affairs, afforded by Harbottle, threw herself back in the carriage, after she had parted with her companion, and dipped her double-chin in her swan's down boa, perfectly satisfied that she had utterly confounded the "Parson's Daughter."

"I have settled *that* young lady's business," thought her ladyship; "I had not much time to do it in, but done it I have. Poor, dear child! what with patronising her, and coaxing her, and frightening her, she will never think more of my George Augustus Frederick!"—of whom, by the way, her ladyship felt an inveterate anxiety to know something herself.

Emma, unused to the world and to worldly things, was endued with an inherent good sense, which more particularly, more entirely, belongs to women than to men, and which taught her to consider the facts and opinions expressed by Lady Frances in the dark, as near to truth as her ladyship's curls and complexion were in the daylight near to nature. Genuine straightforward principle, impose upon it as you will, must eventually come out bright and pure. Emma had seen Lady Frances, in the glare of lamps and candles, candidly avow her ignorance of Sheringham's destination. She knew *that* to be truth. Was she, with a mind like hers, likely to be deceived by a second edition of this history, evidently prepared after the occurrence of a conversation which, however disagreeable to her ladyship, was infinitely more painful to Emma? Not she. She looked back on the dialogue, or rather monologue, in the carriage, with but one feeling—pity for her companion, who, not only in contradiction of facts established, but in direct opposition to the candid declarations of George himself, had uttered falsehoods, the objects of which (so thinly were they skinned over) were just as evident to Emma as to Lady Frances.

Fanny, during this period, was perhaps suffering as much, if not more, than any of the other personages of

this little drama ; for, in addition to all her personal feelings of distress and annoyance, connected with what may perhaps be called the main plot, she was distressed beyond measure at the position in which she had placed her innocent friend. It seemed impossible to undeceive Sheringham with respect to Miss Lovell's real feelings ; and although Lady Frances' story about " dear Catherine," which, of course, with the rest of the carriage dialogue, was repeated by Emma to Fanny at the very first opportunity, might have a very slender foundation, yet it was clear that somebody called Catherine was somehow connected in her mind with her son's settlement in life, and it was impossible to say what he might be driven to do, in a state of desperation, if he fell again into her society, or the circle in which she moved. The blow once struck — the knot once tied, and Emma's happiness, and perhaps his own, would be for ever blighted.

The greatest change, however, that manifested itself just at this period, was exhibited in the manner and spirits of the Squire ; by dint of repetition his faithful Hollis had at last excited in his mind, if not absolute jealousy, at least suspicion ; and when Fanny returned, tired, worried, and out of spirits, from the excursion to the fishing cottage, she was conscious that what she had apprehended had come to pass, and that Mr. Hollis, who had been closeted with his master after his arrival, had repeated the disjointed conversation he had overheard in the library, improved upon, most probably, by some fanciful additions of his own.

" So, Fanny," said the Squire, with a scowling look, which generally portended a storm, " Mr. Harvey is gone — suddenly — without stopping to say good-by, or shake hands, or any thing else. He leaves a note to say he must go to London on particular business, and now I hear that he is *not* gone to London at all ; that he is for the present gone over to Ullsford, and that he is expected to spend a week or ten days at the Mordaunts."

" Upon my word," said Fanny, " I am not at all aware of his engagements."

" You saw him, I think, before he went, Fan," said the Squire.

" I did."

" Alone in the library ? "

" Yes, alone in the library."

" I thought, perhaps," continued her husband, " you had some particular wish that he should go."

" I *had* a particular wish that he should go," replied Fanny ; " he had promised to go before."

" Whom did his staying annoy ? " asked Harbottle.

" The reports which had been circulated about his attachment to Emma, rendered his remaining here injurious to her."

" Why more to-day than a week ago ? "

" After that long interview in the conservatory," said Fanny, not quite so collectedly as she usually said things.

" Ah ! that was it. Oh ! and that frightened away the Captain, and now you are making up a match between the Captain and the Parson's Daughter."

" I do not consider myself making up a match," said Fanny.

" Helping it on, though," said Harbottle ; " my motto is, Never meddle or make in matters like these ; however, I suppose you would rather she should marry *him*, than Harvey."

" To me," said Fanny, " it is, of course, a matter of perfect indifference."

" It may be," said Harbottle ; " but a lady sometimes grows so used to a favourite that she does not like to lose him."

" Favourite ! " exclaimed Fanny, " what on earth do you mean ? "

" Why I mean," said the Squire, in a tone of the bitterest severity, — " I mean that every body in the house is talking of your conduct with my ' young friend,' as they call him. Your own maid — your pet maid — Mrs. Devon — Devil I believe would be a better word — talks of his notes to you, and your conversations with him. I have heard it all, Fanny, but I have affected for *your* sake to treat the tale with contempt, and threatened those who

spoke of it, if they ever breathed it to me again, to send them all packing."

"If you had so treated their intelligence because you disbelieved it, rather than in consideration of me," said Fanny, "you would have better deserved my affection. Am I to defend myself against these imputations — am I to explain — am I to humiliate myself?"

"No, no! Fanny," said Harbottle. "The principal part of the history, and which does you the most credit, you have carefully concealed from me. Harvey's going had nothing to do with Emma Lovell. Come, come, no disguise! more people than two may be in a conservatory or in a library, at the same time. I give you credit for all you have done; I should have liked it better if I had been consulted. Kiss me, Fanny! all is forgiven and forgotten, as far as *you* are concerned. But as for my 'young friend,' as my servants call him, who, under the mask o- friendship, has made me absurd and contemptible — for *him* —"

— "Dearest William!" said Fanny, who knew how terrible his revenge would be, if permitted to have free play, "listen to me: you say you have treated your informants — spies upon my words and actions — as such persons should be treated, and declared your utter disbelief in all their histories for *my* sake. Is it not clear — consult your own judgment, let reason master passion — is it not clear that any steps taken against Mr. Harvey, in a case where, if you consider *him* faulty, *I* cannot be blameless —"

— "Yes, yes," interrupted Harbottle, "you *are* blameless."

"But will the world think so, if my name becomes publicly coupled with an object of your avowed hatred and vengeance? If, as you say you do, and as I deserve you should, believe me innocent, and should it be your intention to break off your acquaintance with Mr. Harvey, would it not be better to let the intercourse and intimacy cease, without any open declaration of hostility?"

"Perhaps it might," said Harbottle; "but then," continued he, clenching his fist, "he escapes scot-free."

"Escapes!" said Fanny, "what has he to escape from? what has he done? what act ——"

"Come, come, Fan," interrupted her husband, "I cry peace, but I must not hear him or his conduct defended. For your sake ——"

"For my sake!" exclaimed Fanny; "believe me, if I did not think you were thoroughly and entirely convinced of my innocence, your tenderness or compassion would break my heart — a heart which, God knows, has never entertained a thought derogatory to your honour, or harboured a wish injurious to your happiness. I cannot live under your suspicions; indeed — indeed, it would be greater kindness to kill me at once."

"Come, come, my poor girl!" said Harbottle, "no crying — no crying. I do believe you innocent of any thing wrong. I myself thought Mr. Harvey was getting rather too free and easy, but I was confident in *you*, and troubled my head little about it; but when other people begin to talk, and wink, and nod, and laugh — that I cannot bear."

"The opportunity of checking any such impertinences, if indeed you can imagine they exist," said Fanny, "presents itself. Mr. Harvey is gone — let him never return. You parted not in anger, and if you meet ——"

"Meet — God forbid that I should meet *him*!" exclaimed Harbottle, with an expression of countenance worthy the hand of Fuseli, "except face to face, at twelve paces distant, a ——"

"Oh! William, William," said Fanny, "banish such thoughts — he has never deserved your hate."

"You think not," said Harbottle: "was his conduct in the library, when you parted, that of a dear friend? was ——"

"Oh, pray! pray, William!" sobbed Fanny, "end this painful, dreadful conversation; acquit me entirely, or discard me totally — I am conscious of my own rectitude."

"Do I deny it?"

"Then, for mercy's sake — for the sake of justice — spare me all these allegations, raked together by persons whose duty would be better pursued to their master by attention to their own services, than by poisoning his mind with

details of circumstances of which they can neither comprehend the causes nor effects, and which — ”

“ Come, come,” interrupted Harbottle, “ no preaching, and no running down my servants, who have for years and years been faithful to me, and to whom I have been before indebted for acts of kindness and affection, which I am very proud of and thankful for. Dry your eyes—I hate to see your eyes look red—and dress for dinner. Let’s have no more of this: it is all over, forgiven and forgotten, as far as *you* are concerned, but — ”

Fanny knew enough of Harbottle to know the meaning of the last word he uttered. She was convinced that nothing but revenge for what, by the exaggeration of spies, he had been taught to consider Harvey’s duplicity, would calm or satisfy him; and knowing too, as *she* did, that whatever *had* occurred, trivial indeed as it was, had its origin in herself, and had arisen from the best and most scrupulously honourable feelings on both sides, it was natural that the forgiveness of her husband, of what, in fact, was no offence, should not release her from an anxiety for another, to whom, as we have already seen, she was sincerely attached as a companion and friend.

Such scenes as this, which I have endeavoured faithfully, yet I fear faintly, to describe, are not so rare in domestic life as the still unmarried world may fancy, and yet, with all its little ills and evils, man knows no happiness until he marries. Let him possess a woman of sense and virtue, and of whom he himself is worthy, and he will feel a solid and permanent joy, of which he never was before sensible. “ For,” as somebody says, “ the happiness of marriage, like the interest of money, arises from a regular and established fund, while unmarried libertines live upon the principal, and so become bankrupts both in character and respectability.”

To be sure (as indeed the same authority tells us), “ uninterrupted happiness no man can or ought to expect. Life is no sinecure; fruits do not now spring spontaneously from the earth as they did in the garden, nor does manna drop from the clouds as it did in the wilderness.” But, as a scheme of solid comfort, matrimony affords to well-

regulated minds a double share of pleasure in prosperity, and a solace and support in sorrow and adversity.

The assembled party at Binford "needed no ghost" to tell them that there had been a family storm during the interval between their return and dinner, even if the swollen eyes of their hostess, and the forced smiles which, strange to say, the angry frowns of her husband drove her to assume, had not sufficiently proclaimed the fact; the ladies' maids had communicated each to her mistress the outlines of the domestic history; for Devon, although in some sort attached to Mrs. Harbottle, was too vain of being trusted ever to keep a secret, arguing somewhat logically that a secret is of no use in the world if one may tell it; and, therefore, in the plenitude of her knowledge, and in the exercise of her natural communicativeness, she had mentioned to Mrs. Snagthorpe's and Mrs. Dempster's *soubrettes* what she knew *was to happen* when her master returned; because Mr. Hollis had forewarned *her* of the course he was about to pursue, in order to put her upon her guard if she should be questioned by the Squire about the note which Harvey sent; Hollis believing her to have a sufficient quantity of the inherent spirit of intrigue, mingled with a certain degree of affection for her mistress in her composition, to induce her to deny, in the most positive manner, ever having carried (or even seen) a *billet* from Mr. Harvey to Mrs. Harbottle.

The caution of Hollis might lead the speculative reader into the belief that, in the midst of all his mischievous proceedings, he had some feeling towards Mrs. Devon, which induced him to let her into his confidence just as far as was necessary to prevent her committing herself in a falsehood, and being—as he was convinced she would be by his irascible master—kicked into the street on the instant of her detection. Upon this point, knowing little, we say less.

To describe the sort of evening which was passed after this scene would be to recount the duration of dulness from the time dinner was served till the ladies retired. Fanny made her excuses, and left them early. Harbottle drank much, and talked much, and even laughed much,

but the demon of revenge was lurking in his heart ; and when he reeled up stairs to bed, his deepest regrets were occasioned by thinking that Harvey was beyond the reach of his immediate chastisement. He sat himself down in his dressing-room, his temples throbbed, and his eyes swam in his head ; he unlocked his pistol-case, he poised one of the deadly weapons in his hand, raised it, then dashed it upon the table with an oath, as if in despair that Charles was at the moment beyond the range of its bullet. He recurred to all his hospitality, his friendship, his intimacy with Harvey : recalled to his recollection all the proofs which Harvey had seemed to give of affection and friendship for *him* ; turned over in his mind the numberless incidents which had occurred, in which he and Fanny had been engaged together — all such thoughts and recollections being heightened and exaggerated by the effects of the wine he had swallowed.

To hunt down the miscreant whom he thought had stung him — to call him out — to shoot him if he could, were the objects of his present anxiety ; but the certainty that such a measure would give publicity to his suspicions — to his shame, perhaps — checked his sanguinary desires. He could not endure to become the mark for ridicule or pity, as a dishonoured husband ; and in this struggle between the baser passion for revenge and the more venial feeling of vanity, the distracted man consumed the greater part of the night ; and when at last he laid his head upon his pillow, sobered by reflection, and saddened by suspicion, he fell into a fitful slumber, from which he awoke next morning as little refreshed in body as he was relieved in mind.

CHAPTER XI.

Oh, my hard fate! why did I trust her ever?
What story is not full of woman's falsehood?
The sex is all a sea of wide destruction;
We are vent'rous barks, that leave our home
For those sure dangers which their smiles conceal.

LEE.

RETURN we now to Captain Sheringham, whose expedition to the metropolis in some degree resembled that of Cadmus, who being sent off by his father Agenor to pursue his sister Europa, happened to be struck with the beauty of a particular situation, and stopped to build the city of Thebes on his way. Sheringham, bound to London, and resolved upon cutting the thread, if not of the Fates, at least of his connection with the fickle Emma Lovell, began to feel his animosity, like the courage of Sheridan's Acres, "oozing out at his finger ends," during the first ten miles of his progress.

It was not, perhaps, that his doubts had so speedily abated, or that the impression which what he had seen had made, was fading from his mind, at a rate so rapid as to entirely alter his views and feelings; but it was the certainty, in his present humour, if it lasted, that he should take some decisive measure upon his arrival in town, which would utterly and for ever shut the door against any explanation, and terminate irrevocably all further intercourse with the only being for whom he had ever felt a sincere and devoted affection, which induced this modification of his passion. The faint glimmering of hope—and a small spark it was—that, in spite of appearances, she was not the faithless creature he feared her to be, increased gradually as the distance between them lengthened, and when he reached Ullsford, he ventured to stay his flight; and if he were not, like Cadmus, disposed to found a city, at least he felt a powerful inclination to indulge himself by building a few castles.

According to this plan he resolved to ensconce himself in the best inn at that excellent market-town, and write by

the night's mail back to his lady mother, informing her of his halt, and begging to hear from her by return of post; thinking, by this proposition, with which he was quite sure she would agree, to hear something relating to the politics of Binford, which might serve to throw a light upon his own particular affair, being at the moment decidedly of opinion that the *dénouement* of Emma's acceptance of Harvey was at hand, and that, in all probability, that very day would be selected for its announcement.

Having written his letter, the unhappy captain ordered his dinner; for he was not one of those sighing swains “who,” the proverb says—why, nobody has ever exactly ascertained—“live on love, as larks on leeks,” but, on the contrary, held that the diseases of the mind were rather allayed than excited by the refreshment of the body; and while the repast was preparing, he took a stroll about the town.

There had been times when the sight of the well-curled damsels, standing at the shop-doors, or working, or seeming to work, behind their counters, would have excited his attention at least: the library, half-filled as it was, with the best of the neighbours, would once have drawn him into its gay vortex; and the promenade, at the end of the town, called there the Esplanade, had his heart been at ease, and his mind in tune, would have charmed him, so thronged was it with pretty people, all looking as fresh and gay as none but English-women ever look by daylight. All these he now gazed at with lack-lustre eye, and bent his solitary way to the church-yard, where he lingered and loitered, reading epitaphs and watching grave-diggers, till it was time, as he thought, to return to his hostelry.

There are periods of a man's existence, when being left alone—all entirely alone—is very delightful: this evening was one of those in Sheringham's life—he could have been happy in no society but Emma's, and that he was not destined to enjoy. All conversation but hers would have tormented him to death—alone, he could think of her and of her falsehood without fear of interruption; and, after dinner, while sipping his wine, and reading the “*Ladies' Magazine* for 1789 and 1790,” adorned with plates of

distinguished persons, he “ever and anon” lifted his eyes from the book to the ceiling, as he came to passages in the pleasing little romances of those days, under the titles of “Eloise, or the Delicate Distress,”—“Jacintha, or the Cruel Uncle,”—“Henry, or the Stray Lamb,” &c., which he could, by the force of ingenuity, twist into an application to his own unfortunate case; and in this state of vegetation he remained until about ten o’clock, when, at about the period at which a London afternoon begins, he betook himself to rest—or at least to horizontal reflection; for so fixed were his thoughts upon his false fair one, that, up or in bed, his cogitations were the same, the only difference being in the attitude which he chose his body to assume.

The post arrived in the morning; no letter from Lady Frances in answer to his, which she must have received early in the preceding evening, and quite in time to reply to it—what was the meaning of that?—was she ill—or would she not write? In answer to the questions which the Captain put to the waiters at the inn, and subsequently to the post-master’s daughter, he found no solution of the mystery of the non-arrival of her despatch. His mother was an excellent correspondent—she loved writing, and did nothing else all the morning long than cover sheet after sheet of paper, not only with lines horizontal, but lines perpendicular, and lines diagonal, so that no possible spot or corner of her letters should escape unwritten on. She could not surely be unwell—but if she were, she knew by his letter where to address him; and supposing her illness sudden, as it must have been, and so serious that she could not herself write, her maid might have acted as secretary for the home department for once. He was, however, greatly annoyed by the failure of the intelligence, and resolved upon going back himself to Binford by that night’s mail, if something did not turn up in the course of the day. He would then get there by night—neither would his eyes be pained with the sight of Harvey and Emma taking the “walk of the affianced,” nor would they enjoy the triumph of beholding the defeated and discarded lover moping in solitary sadness under the spreading yew-trees, which shelter the walk from the Rectory to the church.

That scheme was selected, and another day of agreeable single-blessedness was before him.

He lengthened his walk upon this occasion, and enjoyed his own thoughts uninterruptedly in a stroll for upwards of five hours; having returned from which, and finding no news from his lady mother, he again proceeded to the worldly pursuit of dining.

As he passed to his sitting-room, a man whom he recognised as Harvey's servant, Evans, touched his hat to him in the passage. Sheringham was startled. What brought *him* here? a spy, perhaps. To ask after his master, whom of all other people upon earth he hated most, and least wished to see, would be absurd; and yet, what should he do? At the moment he did nothing but pass on—the waiter followed—of *him* he enquired if Mr. Harvey was in the house?—Yes; he had just arrived.

"This," thought George Frederick Augustus, "is deucedly provoking. What can have brought him here?"—"Is Mr. Harvey alone?" said the Captain.

"Yes, sir," said the waiter, "he sleeps here to-night, and has ordered horses to-morrow for his britcska to Mr. Mordaunt's."

"Oh," said Sheringham, "he is not going back to Binford?"

"No, sir."

"That's odd," thought the Captain, "that now is very odd. I don't see why I should quarrel with him—we parted good friends—never spoke so civilly since we knew each other as we did when we separated at the Parsonage. If he is not going to Binford—eh—how is it—let me see, she cannot have jilted *him* too—one down another come on? No, no, that cannot be—but then, the conservatory—the breakfast—the walk—these are so many 'handkerchiefs which the Egyptian did to my mother give'—are they all 'trifles, light as air?'—but then, *he* is here—Emma there—*she* is not coming away, *he* is not going back. Oh, let me break the ice—let me overcome suspicion—let us either fight or be friends. Hang it, one way or another it must end."

At the conclusion of this soliloquy, he gave the bell a

tremendous pull, and, at his bidding, the waiter stood before him.

"Has Mr. Harvey ordered dinner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is he come down?"

"No, sir."

"Where is his servant?"

"Here, sir."

Evans appeared.

"When did Mr. Harvey leave Binford?" said the Captain.

"About half-past two, sir," said Evans.

"He is going to Mr. Mordaunt's?"

"Yes, sir, to-morrow."

"Does he return soon to Binford?"

"I think not, sir," said Evans; and in saying it, George, who was watching him like an Old Bailey counsel, saw an expression in his countenance which he vainly endeavoured to suppress, and which meant more than the simple answer seemed to convey.

"Come away suddenly—eh?" said George.

"Very, sir," said Evans.

"I wish—I wish," said Sheringham, "you would go to your master—make my compliments, and say that I am here alone; and that if he will do me the favour to join me at dinner, I shall be too happy."

"I will, sir."

Away went Evans. This was curious—a triumphant lover would not leave his prize thus—what could it mean? was he in despair?—had he been beaten—rejected—deceived—it was quite a case of sympathy. Harvey's answer in the affirmative was couched in the most friendly terms, and Evans was directed to order the people to blend the dinners—another case of sympathy—the same soup—broiled whitings—a roast-fowl and egg-sauce—an omelette aux herbes fines, and a tart, had been ordered by both the gentlemen; four whitings instead of two, two fowls instead of one, and so on in progression, accordingly appeared, and shortly after entered Charles Harvey himself.

When he came into the room he affected a gaiety which

Sheringham in an instant saw was forced — he was delighted to see it ; and instantly shook hands with the man, whom an hour before he considered his deadliest foe, with the greatest cordiality.

" You don't look well, Harvey," said Sheringham.

" I am not well at all," replied Harvey ; " but, pray, may I enquire what on earth took you so suddenly from Binford, and what on earth brings you here ! "

" Sympathy, I suppose," said Sheringham ; " for your own questions echoed would be those most suitable to my enquiries about *you*."

" I am here," said Harvey, " *malgré moi* — I am going to the Mordaunts."

" You had not long fixed that visit," said Sheringham.

" It depended entirely on my stay at Harbottle's," replied Charles ; " I promised, whenever I left Binford, to go to Marchlands."

" I had no idea that you were going to leave Binford so soon."

" I did intend coming away the day before yesterday," said Harvey ; " but the Squire would insist upon my stopping. I wish I had not been persuaded to stay. I saw Miss Lovell just as I left the village this afternoon — looking handsomer than ever."

" The devil you did," thought the Captain. " I wish you had kept that fact to yourself, at least till we had dined."

" Lady Frances," continued Charles, " I did not see : she dined with us yesterday at the Hall ; and I am afraid Harbottle was excessively rude. I know from the conversation at breakfast this morning, that poor Emma Lovell was made extremely uncomfortable by his allusions."

" Miss Lovell, too," said Sheringham, " his allusions — oh !"

" About *you*," said Harvey.

" Me ! —"

At this crisis, when the Captain was wound up to a pitch of excitement and expectation, which nobody not chin-deep in love can properly estimate, the door of the room flew open, and the master of the George appeared at

the head of his waiters, bearing the Siamesed repast for the two disconsolate lovers. The noise the men made in putting the things down rattled through the brains of the friends, for such they now seemed destined to be ; and by the time the Yahoos, who invariably couple noise with smartness, had, in their slap-dash manner, arranged the table and placed the chairs for the guests, they each wished the meal over, in order to get rid of the encumbrance of the attendants, in whose presence it was, of course, impossible to touch upon the subject nearest their hearts.

The meeting between these two young gentlemen was curious : the circumstances were such, and so peculiar, that they produced in the course of the evening from Harvey what perhaps nothing else upon earth could have extracted from his bosom, the confession of a fervent, deep-rooted, and unalterable attachment for Fanny.

"Indeed, indeed," said Harvey, "if any human being had told me that, living as I have been with Harbottle, it was possible I should have allowed passion so far to gain the mastery of reason, of principle, and of honour, I would have felled him to the earth. Unconsciously and unwittingly did I entangle myself in this fatal attachment. Not one word of love has ever passed my lips, not one thought has ever crossed my mind, which I would have disowned or disguised even from her husband ; but, Sheringham, the moment came when I was undeceived ; she painted her own unhappy circumstances to me ; she said little ; but then it was, and then, for the first time, I knew, I loved her. All I have explained to you about my long conversations with that most amiable of beings, Miss Lovell, heightened rather than diminished my affection. An appeal was made to my feelings, to my honour, to save her—save her from what, George? —was not this a confession that my fatal passion was in some degree reciprocated?"

"My dear friend," said Sheringham, "you must not agitate yourself thus ; you have acted honourably and wisely ; time, and reflection, and reason will overcome this, and —"

"Preach, Sheringham, preach," said Charles ; "but recollect, that the preacher is most efficient who acts up to

his doctrines. Had your Emma (for *yours she is*, rely upon it, heart and soul,) been torn from you, or had you quitted her under the impression that you never were again to see her, what would you have done?"

"Why, my dear friend," said George, "precisely what *I have been doing* for the last four-and-twenty hours, and you should console yourself with the reflection that, however much *you suffer*, the object of your ill-fated attachment is safe — safe beyond the reach of pain or calumny."

"True, so she is," answered Charles; "but what a blank is my existence now! Where shall I find solace, where dissipate regrets of which I never anticipated the depth or extent, until forced to endure them! Travelling — travelling, must be my resource. On the Continent, through scenes unconnected with any recollections of her, I may perhaps be tormented into other thoughts. But for life the feeling lasts, here — here, in my heart."

"I thought," said Sheringham, "when I first met you at Harbottle's, that you entertained *rather* a favourable opinion of the lady of the house, and I must admit that I also thought her opinion of you was not much less *friendly!* but one sees so very much of that sort of family compact in the general run of society, that I, who make a point of never interfering where I think my officiousness might be superfluous, troubled my head no more about it; but I declare to you that the greatest surprise your confidential communication has created on my mind is the fact, that the *dénouement* of the affair is a thing of only a few days old."

"Ah, Sheringham," said Harvey, "you do not know what an admirable creature that woman is — what, in point of fact, she suffers, and how she bears her sufferings; but, never mind, leave me to a course of sorrow which I deserve, and of repentance which I need. As you justly say, thank God! she is safe and blameless; and in that recollection I am comparatively happy, even in my misery. You have a brighter prospect before you, and so has Emma; for although in point of fortune she may all her life be poor, she will marry the man she loves, and who is calculated to make her happy."

"But, my dear fellow," said Sheringham, who, having received from Harvey all the particulars of his interviews with Miss Lovell, all the causes of their conversations and meetings, had become the gayest of the gay, and, above all, most anxious to console and enliven his companion, "you really are forerunning my expectations. I have no assurance, but your word, that Emma Lovell cares one single sixpence about me. I have, like you, never spoken of love: she has never expressed any thing but good-nature and kindness, and at those luncheons ——"

"Ah," said and sighed Charles Harvey, "those fatal, fascinating meetings — now terminated!"

"Well terminated for all parties," said George. "No sorrow — hope — hope, Charles."

"Where am I to look for hope — for comfort?"

"Time and patience," continued the Captain, "are required to soothe us in all great calamities; but rely upon it ——"

Here entered a waiter with a small brown paper parcel, directed to Captain Sheringham, R. N., George Inn, Ullsford, per Swannington coach. It was a letter from Lady Frances, thus enveloped, innocently to defraud the General Post-office, and secure the receipt of its contents that evening, her ladyship having, from some cause, "yet unexplained," missed the day's post — as ladies with a large correspondence sometimes do.

The seal broken, the packthread cut, George read as follows: —

"Dale Cottage, Aug. 30. 1830.

"My Dear George,

"I cannot describe to you the pain and agitation I suffered from your sudden and most unexpected disappearance, and I assure you the mortification I have undergone since, upon account of your flight, has, in no small degree, increased the effects of that uneasiness. I have had Popjoy with me, and have taken an ocean of camphor julep, and some other horrid messes which he has sent me. I of course gave him Halford's prescription, which, as usual, brought me round a little, and your kind and affectionate letter has, for the present, effected my cure.

" I had, last night when I came home, made up my mind, certainly, if you did not return, never to visit the Harbottles again. His rudeness is beyond endurance, and, under the influence of constant intoxication in the evening, he throws off every thing like restraint or a regard for the common decencies of society. The people who are staying with them are, a horrid wooden-headed looking man, with red cheeks and a black bristly head, whose name I have never been able yet to pronounce, with a mawkish, pale-faced dawdle of a wife, drest after the prints in the magazines, and a sister who, upon my word, is not presentable any where. Then there is an old lawyer, (Dumps, I think they call him,) as deaf as a post and as rude as a bear, with a prim starched better half, who talks slip-slop more admirably than the lady in the *Rivals* — when speaking of an open heath, she talks of a dissolute situation in the country ; and while Mrs. Harbottle, who really knows something, was speaking of the arts, she volunteered her opinion that ' statutes were nasty things, but that of pictures she had always heard the most beautiful that ever was painted was the *Anno Domini* of Apelles.'

" At such things as these I could laugh if I had any body to laugh with me; but the people who are here, of course, see nothing ridiculous in their own absurdities or those of their companions, and sit round the room in sober sadness, and fancy *that* society.

" What put me in a serious passion with Mr. Harbottle were some very coarse allusions about you and the Parson's Daughter, and *that* too in her presence ; now really a joke, if joke it may be considered, at the expense of two people when absent, is all very well ; but while the poor creature was present, filling her head with notions which could only end in disappointment to her, was too outrageous ; and when the Squire said that she had given up Mr. Harvey for your sake, I really was in such a passion as to tell him that upon that subject he had better look nearer home, for that there was a lady of his acquaintance who did not seem disposed to give up Mr. Harvey for any body.

" This morning the Squire called upon me full of apologies for what he had been told had offended me. He appeared

to recollect nothing of the matter himself, but some of his odious friends had, at breakfast, recalled to his memory my observation about young Harvey ; and you cannot imagine what I suffered between the stupidity of the man himself and my own anxiety not to be mixed up in any of their quarrels or grievances. When he insisted, jocularly of course, upon my telling him who the lady was who was so devoted to Charles, as he called him, I could say nothing, but advised him to try and find out, which I should not have done if I had imagined he had the least chance of succeeding in his scrutiny. He insisted upon my dining with them to-day, to show that I was not offended ; and as I could not in this place plead any other engagement, I am going fully prepared for the frowns of the lady, who, I have no doubt, will erroneously attribute what I said in a moment of irritation to annoy him some little tittle-tattle desire of showing *her* up, which I declare to have been the farthest thing in the world from my intentions.

"I, however, took the opportunity of this *tête-à-tête* with the Squire to set him right upon the subject of Miss Lovell. I had, indeed, in the course of our drive homewards from the Hall, talked *at* her, in describing the sort of person I should like you to marry ; and I believe, from the tone of voice in which she replied, for I could not see the expression of her countenance, that I completed the affair entirely, gave her hopes the *coup de grace*, and prepared her for woe and willows ; but it struck me, as I know Mrs. Harbottle to be her chief, indeed only friend and confidant, that it would be wise to instil into the thing, which Mr. Harbottle calls his mind, the conviction that any serious connection with the Lovells had never entered your head. I represented you, as I think you merit, full of vivacity and general admiration for nice and pretty people, with a turn for flirting, and accomplishments exactly suited to the indulgence of the pursuit. Be that as it may, I made them understand that you have no more idea of connecting yourself with the Parson's Daughter than the Pope has, nor much more right than his holiness to think of such a thing ; that being yourself without fortune, you certainly could only marry with money ; and that, therefore, putting all *the other impossibilities* out

of the question, you certainly could not, even if you wished it — which I am sure you did not — marry such a person as the poor little girl whose head I am really afraid you have turned. Having charged the Squire with all these views and intentions, I despatched him to his wife to make a confidence, and was not at all ill-pleased that he proposed taking the Rectory in his way to join ‘the ladies’ in some excursion to his fishing-house, which has cost him more money than fishing-house ever cost, and is not yet half finished.

“ I was so extremely unwell that I could not write in time for to-day’s post, and I therefore have ordered them to forward this by the coach ; and one of my principal reasons for regretting my inability to write sooner is, that I am *extremely* anxious you should go to Somerfield. I wish you to cultivate the acquaintance of Catherine. She is an amiable creature, and, though somewhat older than yourself, so superior, and with such an understanding and such a heart — and I dare say you will jokingly add — and such a fortune ! But there you will do me an injustice. I feel, certainly, as I told Mr. Harbottle, that you ought not to marry without money, but that is a totally different thing from marrying for money. There are as lovely and as excellent young women rich as there are poor ; and although I have no desire to spoil you, and perhaps see you with a mother’s eye, I do really think, considering your personal qualifications and the circumstances of your birth and connections on both sides, that you are fully entitled to aspire to the union of beauty and wealth in the lady with whom you link your fate and fortune. A woman’s heart is always disinterested ; a rich girl is as easily won as a poor one ; it is true, friends and relations may in the one instance thwart, while in the other they would encourage, a successful termination to your suit ; but, as far as the being herself is concerned, I have known the world a long time, and I never knew a rich girl think of her riches, except as affording the means of making *him* happy whose happiness it was her anxiety to make.

“ You must be aware, dear George, that in advising you to proceed, and not return to this place, I make a great personal sacrifice ; indeed, I shall quit it very shortly my-

self. I am so entangled with these oppressive people and their inevitable hospitality, that I am *généd* to death ; and the horrid monsters who compose the rest of the population are so detestable to me, that I cannot make up my mind to get off of the invitations to the Hall, by mixing in the other parties of the place.

“ To-morrow comes partridge-shooting, and the recurrence of that day brings forcibly to my mind all the festivities at Grimsbury, and the joyous meetings in which my poor dear father, and my venerable grandfather before him, took so much delight. All these things are changed ; and here am I destined, I conclude, to pass the anniversary of that once really happy day in the society of the Harbottles and their extraordinary companions. However, do not disturb your arrangements for me, and let me hear from you as soon as you reach town. I will furnish you with a periodical account of our proceedings here ; not but that I think, if I kept a diary for your edification, I might detail the events of Monday at the beginning of each week, and put ditto, ditto, ditto to every succeeding day until Monday came again.

“ Do not fail to write to me ; and believe me, dearest George, your affectionate mother,

“ FRANCES SHERINGHAM.

“ P. S. Popjoy has just been here. He tells me he was sent for, this morning, to see Miss Lovell, whom he found extremely unwell. Poor thing ! I have no doubt her indisposition proceeds from the enlightenment she received last night from me. However, George, the days when ladies died for love are past, and I really think, as indeed I told Popjoy, that his assistant, who is a remarkably smart, red and white young gentleman, would, in the shape of a husband, be of more service to her than all the physic in his shop. There is nothing like putting notions into young men's heads. I am quite sure, Popjoy will tell the lad what I said, and I am not much less sure that I shall get up a flirtation between them.”

This letter and postscript came most opportunely, or rather inopportunely — opportunely to open Sheringham's eyes,

as to his lady mother's manœuvrings, and inopportunely as far as their success was involved. They however corroborated, if they had needed corroboration, all the assertions and statements of Harvey, as to his entire innocence of either attachment or offer to Miss Lovell; for her ladyship, in her anxiety to exhibit the success of her conversation with Emma, had, in point of fact, admitted that the object of her affections was George himself; and this she—the woman of the world—sits down and writes to him, as a probable means of inducing him to relinquish the girl whose head he had turned, and of proceeding to Somerfield to conclude a match with "Catherine."

That her ladyship had over-reached herself in this proceeding is clear; but it must be admitted, in vindication of her policy, that she did not believe in the existence of a serious attachment to Emma on the part of her son. His sudden departure she could not exactly account for; but such had been the by-play of the parties concerned, whilst under her ladyship's *surveillance*, that what she really thought, and what she did not in the slightest degree allude to, was, that George had started off in a fit of jealousy with Harvey, whom she considered his rival in the good graces of Mrs. Harbottle. Upon that point, therefore, she never touched farther than to record her belief of Harvey's success in that quarter, because she was just as anxious that her son should not entangle himself in any scrape with the lady of the Hall, as that he should be in any degree committed to her of the Parsonage—all she desired was, that he should not return to Binford; and when she had sealed the letter we have just read, she thought she had decided that question finally and entirely.

The effect produced, however, was precisely the reverse of that which was expected. Sheringham had quitted his home distracted with jealousy, and convinced of the destruction of all the hopes of happiness to which his acquaintance with Emma had given birth; he was then so far from being assured of her sympathy, that before his eyes, as he believed, he had evidence of her in-

difference towards him ; for, even in the depths of his distress, he could not bring himself to imagine that she could have willingly and wilfully played the deceiver's part ; he, therefore, concluded that she had always preferred Harvey, whom she had known so much longer, and attributed to his own vanity the impression he had taken of her partiality.

But now, Harvey's visit and Lady Frances's letter had cleared up all his doubts ; he had *not* misconstrued the artless manner of the amiable girl ; she was even now suffering perhaps from his absence, coupled with the cruel explanation of his mother ;—there was not a moment to doubt what his course should be — he was resolved to return to Binford in the evening of the following day, to proceed direct to the Parsonage, and there put it beyond the power of his mother to influence the abandonment of his purpose, by proposing to his beloved Emma, and under the sanction of her excellent and exemplary parent, plighting her his faith and truth.

His intention was to take this step before he saw Lady Frances. He had a double motive for adopting this course. He should, in the first place, avoid any discussion with her (for if he saw her, he felt he should be compelled to communicate his intentions to her) ; and, in the second place, if—and there is no certainty in love—Emma *should* refuse him, or her father decline his consent to her marriage under the circumstances, he could then effect his retreat from the village, without incurring, in addition to all other evils, the ridicule and exultation of his noble parent, which she would, no doubt, triumphantly bring into play against him in case of his defeat.

To Charles Harvey, the Captain of course communicated his design, who agreed in its prudence and propriety ; but it was not without a sigh that the unhappy Charles thought again of Binford and all that it contained — its pleasures and amusements, never to be renewed by him, and the society so dear, in which Sheringham might still rejoice, but in which he must never hope to mingle.

Sheringham saw what was passing in Harvey's mind — the sad contrast between the dawning hopes of future joys

for his friend, and the dark clouds closing in upon the setting sun of his happiness.

"Rally, rally, my dear fellow," said Sheringham, — "you will hereafter rejoice in the step you have taken — no medicine is palatable ; you have swallowed the bitter potion, and you will in time recover ; if you had ventured to stand your ground, you might have been beaten ; you fly, and will not be overtaken. Religion, reason, honour, all point out to you the wisdom and propriety of your conduct, and you must not relax."

"I am firm, Sheringham," replied Harvey, "but more astonished at the real state of my heart and feelings than I can describe to you ; I admit that, during my acquaintance and constant association with her, I admired her understanding, her virtue, her feelings, and I became attached to her — devotedly attached as a brother — as a friend. By degrees I observed the coarseness and indelicacy of Harbottle in her presence. I have often seen with pain the blush mantling on her cheeks at expressions or allusions of his. I could not but lament her destiny, and pity her distress ; but all these feelings were pure and disinterested ; nor, till I was forced from her presence, had I an idea of the intensity of my affection, or of its ardour and devoted character."

"How well then and wisely has *she* acted!" said Sheringham : "she saw the danger to which *you* were blind, and like a guardian angel has interposed herself to save you from destruction."

Harvey, who seemed perfectly bewildered at the discovery of the real state of his heart, was not exactly in the humour to agree with all his friend's propositions ; propositions, perhaps, not the more acceptable from being made by a lover, at the very crisis of happiness, to a wretched outcast, driven from the scenes in which alone he loved to dwell.

The friends, however, agreed to remain together till the following afternoon, when Sheringham was to proceed to Binford to put his plan in execution, and Harvey to fulfil his engagement at the Mordaunts'.

CHAPTER XII.

— The fatal shock
 Has doubtless shivered her strong side, she sinks
 So swiftly down, that scarce the straining eye
 Can trace her tattered mast — Where is she now ?
 Hid in the wild abyss with all her crew,
 All lost for ever.

MALLETT.

WHILE the two friends are waiting at Ullsford, preparatory to the execution of their different designs, let us for a moment look into Miss Lovell's boudoir, where, at about twelve o'clock of the day, we shall find her and Mrs. Harbottle closeted together.

" My sufferings," said Fanny, " are indeed more aggravated than I anticipated. My husband's conduct to me is such as would be little less than I deserved, if I had failed in any one duty towards him. Oh ! Emma, conceive, last night, his upbraiding me about Charles before Lady Frances, after all that had passed in the afternoon, and after assuring me that he acquitted me of all participation in what he so cruelly called his misconduct."

" Is it possible ?" said Emma.

" Truth ; not only did he refer to *my* partiality to Harvey, but exultingly proclaimed to Lady Frances that he had now found out whom she meant by a particular friend of his, who seemed not disposed to give up Mr. Harvey to any body. If it were possible for me to repent of having acted rightly, and done my duty rigidly, his conduct and language would induce me to regret that I took the decisive step I felt it right to take with regard to poor Charles."

" The unnatural league," said Emma, " which has been formed between Mr. Harbottle and Lady Frances, (who hate each other, I am sure,) is most dreadful ; for he, in the evening, has no scruple as to language ; and her ladyship, who has no tie to any of us, and comes here for nothing but to amuse herself at our expense, at the least

possible expense to herself, encourages him in his discussions without intending to do so: for though he is *your* husband, Fanny, you will, I am sure, admit that there are times and seasons when he does not exactly comprehend the meanings and intentions of his associates."

"Emma, he *is* my husband," said Fanny, "and that must serve for answer. That he has faults and imperfections, I am not so blind as not to know; but those I could cheerfully endure — have cheerfully endured, and would make any sacrifice to insure his happiness and support his respectability; but to endure cruelty — undeserved cruelty, — caused, too, by the malice of his menials, who are now set to watch me, and report to him, upon his return home, as to what I have done, — where I have been, — what letters I have written, — what orders I have given, is indeed a trial. I will, however, submit. I pray to Heaven to grant me patience — and, with its blessing, I will continue my straight course, even if my poor heart break in the effort."

"Pray, pray," said Emma, "do not agitate yourself thus. Mr. Harbottle will overcome this wayward humour, and —"

"No, Emma, no," interrupted Fanny; "I know his disposition too intimately to hope *that* — his mind never divests itself of an impression once received — let him make what declarations he may — let him assure me, however earnestly, that he either has no suspicion of my misconduct, or that he has forgiven and forgotten my indiscretion altogether, — it is not so: if he were to live for ages, his feelings towards Harvey would remain unchanged, unmitigated; and one of my consolations in sorrow is, that I forced him away before the arts and insinuations of the people by whom I am surrounded had entirely alarmed his jealousy. Besides, to be watched — mistrusted — doubted — oh! Emma, Emma, you *can* have no conception of my unhappiness."

"Believe in my warmest sympathy," said Emma; "I know what it is to be wretched myself."

"Ah, dear girl," said Fanny, "and you may well and justly believe that all my own miseries are aggravated by

a conviction that the plan which I adopted of soliciting your interference with Charles has so sadly interfered with your happiness."

"Perhaps," replied Miss Lovell, "it is all for the best: it is quite evident that even if George Sheringham should feel sufficiently interested about me to return after his delusion is past — and it must surely be dissipated, after he hears of his imaginary rival's departure — I should have no chance of happiness. What Lady Frances said, in our drive home the night before last, was, I felt, intended to kill every hope I might entertain; and certainly, much as I own to you I admire and esteem her son, I never could consent to be admitted into her family against her wish, or looked upon as an intruder into a circle to move in which I have no ambition."

"Nevertheless, Emma," said Fanny, "my belief is, that if Captain Sheringham were to present himself before you, and, after announcing his mother's disapprobation of the match, propose marrying you without her consent, you would —"

"Do not suppose any thing," said Emma: "I have lived the life of a recluse until twenty-one; for the last four years I have made the happiness, as he says, of my dear father. I am unused to the world, and as yet, I believed, unspoiled by its ways. George Sheringham has attached me to him without any forced effort on his part; I knew and admired him for his principles, his talents, his accomplishments, his good-nature, and his agreeable conversation. He is the first and only man who ever made that sort of impression upon my heart or mind; and, if I lose his affection and his society, he will have no successor in either."

"Dear Emma," said Mrs. Harbottle, forgetting her own griefs for the moment in the delight of hearing any thing so new and *naïve*, "make no rash vows: my belief is that Captain Sheringham will be here very shortly — for, after all, it seems he has not gone to London. Lady Frances affects great mystery about the place of his present residence; but I suspect, from something she inadvertently let slip last night, that he is still very near us;

and that, if her endeavours to keep you asunder fail, which I hope and trust they may, he will be here before many days are over."

In this supposition, as we know, Mrs. Harbottle evinced her usual discrimination into the human mind, as far as the gallant Captain's intentions were concerned; but, agreeable as female society is, we must leave the ladies to themselves for a short time, in order to take another glance at the Siamese willow-wearers at Ullsford.

At breakfast these knights-errant met again to talk of themselves; for, as I have elsewhere observed, egotism is the leading characteristic of the lover,—himself, his mistress, his hopes and views, his happiness and misery, form the sole subjects of his conversation. They had, however, so far exhausted the theme the night before, that they were enabled to divide their attention between their own personal grievances, and the grilled fowl, and the eggs, and the ham, and the coffee, and the London paper of the previous day, which Harvey undertook to skim for the benefit of his friend, who was performing the operation, which, at Cambridge, is not called by so gentle a term as tea-making, but which, in point of fact, amounts to neither more nor less.

Charles, accordingly, recited aloud several "we hears," some few "we understands," and many extraordinary falsehoods, of which "we are credibly informed," all of which passed unheeded over the tympanum of Captain George, until, at length, he proceeded to read the following:—

"Extract of a Letter from Malta, dated July 27.

" We have been greatly shocked by a dreadful accident which has happened to an English nobleman and his family, who have been staying here for some time. On Monday last, his lordship, together with his lady, two sons, and a daughter, proceeded on board his lordship's yacht, in which he came from England. The full complement of his men were on board, and they proceeded on a cruise, such as they were in the habit of taking daily. It appears that the weather changed very unfavourably in the middle of

the day, and towards the afternoon the wind blew with uncommon severity. Accustomed to the sea, and confident in his crew, his lordship felt no alarm ; and having plenty of provisions on board, they resolved to stand off from the island, and make the best of it for the night. The weather getting much worse as it grew late, and a heavy sea running, his lordship ordered his captain to let the yacht run away before the wind, under a close-reefed square topsail. The night was pitch-dark ; and, about half-past eleven o'clock, she unfortunately came in contact with a large ship close hauled, which struck her just amidships ; and in one instant, accompanied with a shriek of horror, the ill-fated vessel sunk, with every soul on board.

" Robert Halsey and George Pyts, two of the crew, are the only persons saved. The force of the concussion was such, that the bowsprit of the yacht was torn out of the step, together with several feet of the bulwarks, and part of the cutwater, to which the bob-stay was made fast. Upon this raft, so providentially supplied, the poor fellows floated until morning, when they were fortunately seen by Captain Sale, of the brig Florentia, from Liverpool to this port, who got them safely on board, supplied them with every comfort, and brought them to Valetta.

" The survivors describe the ship which caused their misfortune to be a large black-sided vessel, of about three hundred and fifty tons' burden ; but the night was so dark that, of course, in the confusion of the minute, they had neither time nor opportunity to make out what she was.

" The following are the names of the sufferers : — Lord Weybridge and his lady ; the Hon. Howard Bouverie Sheringham, his eldest ; the Hon. Spencer Cavendish Russell Sheringham, his second son ; and the Hon. Caroline Brandenburgh Sheringham, his lordship's only daughter ; Mr. Thomas Hopkins, Captain ——"

" Stop, stop," said Sheringham : " what, in the name of Old Scratch, are you reading about ? "

Harvey, who was unconscious of the title which the head of George's family bore, was going on methodically to enumerate the crew of the vessel who had perished, but, upon the sudden exclamation, he stopped.

" Why, my dear fellow," said George, " you are making this up—this is gibberish of your own, in order to astound me—it wo'n't do, Charles. I rejoice to see your spirits return ; but drowning a whole family to give me a peerage, is rather too romantic—it is carrying the joke too far ; it would not be tolerated even in one of Colburn and Bentley's namby-pamby novels. Ha ! ha ! ha ! "

" Upon my honour, it is here," said Charles. " What !" cried the Captain, " dispose of a whole family of Sheringhams as you would of a litter of blind puppies ! "

" Look there," continued Harvey.

And he did look ; and notwithstanding that he saw it all in black and white, and that it bore the stamp of authenticity, which to the unenlightened mind is always conferred upon a falsehood by appearing in a newspaper, he could not bring himself to believe that so extraordinary an event could have occurred, which should, " at one fell swoop," dispose of all these people, and place him in a situation which, three months before, was so far out of his reach as in the ordinary course of mortal events to appear unattainable.

" By Jove," said George, " but it looks like truth. No man could sit down and furbish up the facts and names which appear here, without foundation. What ought I to do ? "

" Why," said Harvey, " as I never unexpectedly succeeded to a peerage, I don't feel competent to advise ; but you will hear more of it, of course. You had better start for Dale Cottage directly."

" No, Charles, no," said George. " If the report is false, I should needlessly agitate my mother and expose myself ; if it should be true, it will only be a stronger inducement for me to go to Lovell's this evening before it is known ; and if Emma accepts me for my own sake alone, a poor half-pay commander in the navy, it will at once secure me from attributing her consent to ambitious or interested motives ; and I, on the other hand, shall have the delight of hailing her Lady Weybridge, with a handsome fortune and a place in society, which, dear angel, she is fully qualified to fill."

"But," said Charles, "you seem, in the most of your anticipations with respect to *her*, to forget your grief for the loss of all your relations."

"Why," replied the captain, "in the first place, I have not quite made up my mind to the truth of the story; and, in the next place, if it be true, I never beheld the late lord but once in my life, and that only when I was at Eton; and his half-sovereign tip so affronted me that I never sought or saw him afterwards. My father's eldest brother, whose son he is, was never upon good terms with any of us—him I scarcely recollect—he was nearly twenty years older than my father; and the present or the late lord, if late he be, married an extremely disagreeable person, by whom he had the three children enumerated in the newspaper, and two others who died young. The eldest must be now, or was, fifteen, the second about thirteen, and the girl about eleven. I confess that the accident is a sad one, and I should lament it in any case; but for the little I have known or seen of my relations, I am not disposed to feel more than I should if it had happened to any body else."

"More especially," said Charles, "as a coronet falls into the opposite scale."

"If the coronet," replied George, "should become the fair forehead and blue eyes of my dearest Emma, I should indeed value it, else I declare to you I care little about it. I am, however, decided in my course."

"I never saw a fellow bear elevation with such philosophy," said Harvey; "why, my dear George, there are men, ay, dozens of them, who are ready to forswear their principles, their politics, their creed itself, for the sake of the thing which has just dropped upon your brows, and which you receive with perfect indifference."

"To tell you the truth," said Sheringham, "it is that very readiness, on the one side, to barter honour and honesty for title, and the more shameful readiness, on the other, to grant it as a political bribe and withhold it from just and honourable claims, that so far degrade the dignity in my eyes as to make me indifferent to the advantages it may give me in society, while it puts me on a level with a host of adventurers and pretenders, who, in return for their venality

and tergiversation, are permitted to be accounted peers of the highest and noblest men in the country."

"Do you consider, my dear friend, or lord," said Charles, "as the case may be, what a narrow escape of —"

What he was going to add, we know not, for on the instant, a carriage having been driven up to the door of the inn, which "made the very stones prate at its whereabout," the room-door was suddenly opened, and George's servant rushed in, more dead than alive with haste, and presented his master with the following note from Lady Frances, thus adresed :—

" Lord Weybridge,"
&c. &c. &c.

This was conclusive : the black seal (wax sent for to the Binford "*shop*" express) settled it all.

"Dearest George,—A dreadful event has happened in the family. I trust this will find you still at Ullsford. I have given Roberts orders to follow you if he can trace you. I can explain nothing. Compose your mind, my dearest son. A complication of miseries has befallen your cousin and his family—its importance and extent you may guess by the superscription of this. I have sent the carriage. Come to me instantly. There is much to settle and arrange. I trust you are not gone forward.

" Ever your affectionate mother,
" FRANCES SHERINGHAM."

"Has any body arrived at the cottage, Roberts?" said George to her servant.

"No, *my lord*," was the answer.

It did not sound so much amiss, after all.

"My mother is quite well?"

"Yes, *my lord*."

George rather liked the reply, and asked another question just for the sake of the answer.

"When did you leave Binford?"

"About half-past nine, *my lord*."

"Well, order horses, and go back immediately."

"Yes, *my lord*," said Roberts; and when he got to the

door, turning himself round, added, enquiringly, "four, my lord?"

"Four! what on a bowling-green road as flat as a billiard table? No, a pair, sir."

"Very well, my lord," said Roberts, evidently much disconcerted at his lordship's not immediately altering his mode of travelling.

"Well, my dear lord," said Charles, "let me sincerely congratulate you: it is clear that your bright hours are beginning, and it will be no little consolation in my unhappiness to hear of your brilliant progress."

"I assure you, my dear Harvey," said Lord Weybridge, "this accession of rank and fortune—for the fortune is very extensive—has but one effect upon me. I do not in the slightest degree deny, what it would be affectation not to admit, that the position in which I am so suddenly and unexpectedly placed has, as I have already said, considerable advantages in society; but what I chiefly look to is the increased means it may give me, first, of exhibiting my devotion to that dear girl; and, next, of employing my means and interest for the advantage of deserving people, and for the advancement and support of principles which I have always maintained, and which I pledge my honour—I must do no more now—I never will desert for earldom, marquise, or dukedom."

"Your lordship's carriage is ready," said the master of the George, who appeared *in propriâ personâ, bien poudré*, with a large white waistcoat and top-boots. "I hope, my lord," added the jocund Boniface, "I may be permitted to congratulate your lordship, and to solicit a continuance of the favours which your lordship has been pleased to bestow upon my house?"

"Certainly, certainly," said George, "I fear my connections and pursuits will necessarily take me away from your county; but I shall, I have no doubt, be occasionally at Binford, and shall not fail to remember your courtesy and attention."

The parting of Charles and his now noble friend was extremely cordial. Lord Weybridge apologised for the abruptness of his departure, and promised to write him a succinct

account of the state of affairs at Binford, and a faithful report of his proceedings at the Parsonage, and, having shaken hands with his disconsolate companion, stepped into the chariot which was to bear him to all he held dear ; while Harvey, longing and half-resolved to accompany him, at least as far as the Binford finger-post, nevertheless conquered his rash inclination, and, ordering *his* horses, in half an hour more was on his road to the hospitable home of the Mordaunts.

CHAPTER XIII.

Be thou blest, Bertram ! and succeed thy father
In manners as in shape, thy blood and virtue
Contend for empire in thee, and thy goodness
Share with thy birthright.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE meeting between Lady Frances and her son was of course most enthusiastic: her ladyship caught the ennobled George Augustus Frederick in her arms, and, after the fashion observed by corporations to kings, presented at once her addresses of condolence and congratulation, concluding the latter with the use of the somewhat homely adage, that “it is an ill wind that blows nobody good.”

Her ladyship’s chief alarm upon the occasion had been excited by an apprehension that the new lord might be overcome by the sudden surprise caused by the intelligence of his unexpected accession to the family honours ; but she soon found that all her cares upon that point had been superfluous, since the common newspapers had made him acquainted with the event even before the receipt of her letter.

The despatch which conveyed the news to Lady Frances was written from London by the Reverend Mr. Crabshaw, who had been tutor to the two young Sheringhams ; but who, on account of indisposition, had not, as usual, accompanied them in their excursion on the day of the fatal accident : he

stated that he had, upon his arrival in town, visited the late lord's solicitors, in whose hands he knew his lordship to have left a will, and that they — who he presumed would also write to Lady Frances (being, as he himself was, ignorant of her son's address) — were extremely anxious to see his lordship ; and that in his (Mr. Crabshaw's) opinion, his lordship ought not to lose a moment in proceeding to visit their chambers, as, of course, the unexpected and afflicting event would cause a great change in the actual disposition of the late lord's personal property.

" You see, my dear George," said her ladyship, " you hav'n't a moment to lose. What an extraordinary and sudden alteration in your position, — from a poor half-pay commander in his Majesty's navy to a peer of the realm ! "

" True," said George, " and if it might be permitted for a sailor to joke upon so melancholy an accident, which has deprived him of a family of cousins, about whom he knew little and cared less, I might certainly boast that I still owe my promotion entirely to the sea. However, I suppose there is no necessity for my immediate departure."

" I should say immediate," said Lady Frances ; " I repeat my conviction that not a moment is to be lost. How do you know who are your cousin's executors ? how do you know but steps may be taken which ought not to be taken without your presence and concurrence ? Take my advice, my dear George — order horses directly, and be off."

" Hang it," said George, " I have sometimes dreamt — or in my waking dreams, perhaps, fancied — myself Lord Weybridge, and I used to think myself a great deal happier in the enjoyment of my visionary title than I do in this accession to the real one. The change of station will produce a change of scenes and circumstances, and I had begun to like Binford so much — "

" That you went away from it in disgust," interrupted her ladyship, " two days ago : depend upon it, my dear George, when you have tasted the sort of life to which this accession to title and wealth will habituate you, you will soon learn to look upon *the circle* in which we have been lately moving with a mixture of pity and disgust. I don't mean to deny Mrs. Harbottle her merits,

nor to gainsay the virtues of Miss Lovell, but — what are such people as Lovells and Harbottles in the scale of society? — what can be more flat, stale, and unprofitable than to live with people highly respectable and vastly good, and very rich, and all that, who exist upon surmises and contradictions, when, as you are now qualified to do, a man can mingle in the very scenes of which the amiable middling classes speak only traditionally, and bear a part in transactions, the discussion of which forms the subject of their uncertain conversations? No, no, from this day forward, depend upon it, Binford is no place for you."

"I don't quite see all that, my dear mother," said George. "It is true I am Lord Weybridge; and, therefore, nominally, something better-sounding than I was yesterday; but my blood, my family, my connections are all precisely the same; and I am sure of this, that hitherto, amongst your associates and companions, I have never found any very great favour. Lady Gorgon, your most intimate friend, used, when I went to her house, to drive her daughters out of my way, as a shepherd would his flock from a wolf; and if ever I danced with one of those Lady Janes or Lady Annes, the looks of the duchess during the whole quadrille were like those of a basilisk."

"Ah, but then —"

"Then, my dear mother, I was a commander in his Majesty's navy, with the splendid revenue of seven shillings and sixpence per diem; and, therefore, noble as my blood was — and I know you agree with me that it *is* noble on both sides," added the Captain, smiling, — "none of your noble acquaintances ever smiled upon *me*. Here I came to Binford, the same poor half-pay fish, and found —"

"For Heaven's sake don't talk of what is to be found *here*," exclaimed her ladyship. "Go to London, and see what is to be found *there*."

"Oh," said George, "I am quite prepared for my reception; George Sheringham, having cast his skin, and burst from the chrysalism of a commander on half-pay into the splendid butterflyism of a barony, will find mothers, and aunts, and dowagers, and chaperones, press-

ing forward to proffer the sweetest buds and blossoms for him to flutter and flirt withal ; but then, Lady Frances, is it not possible that your ladyship's son may have sense enough to discriminate between the favour and affection which are bestowed upon him for himself alone and those which are excited by his title and fortune. Depend upon it, one of the most difficult positions in the world is, that of a young and wealthy nobleman, who, differently placed from men in different circumstances, finds ready access to the homes and hearts of all the beauties of his country. He sees their smile, he hears their praise, he finds himself sought, he feels himself admired. Where vanity exists not in an eminent degree, doubt qualifies the pleasure this encouragement inspires, and he immediately begins considering whether he individually, or the title and station he commands, are the objects of attraction. For myself, I honestly confess I believe there never existed such a thing as an interested *young* woman upon earth — there *may be* ambitious ones, and where the heart is not prepossessed, those might prefer a coroneted lover to one who merely wears a hat ; still, when a man knows that he is so loved for himself alone — ”

“ Well, but, my dear George,” said Lady Frances, “ as you know no such thing, and as you have thrown over poor Catherine, who, dear soul, really was, I believe, very fond of you *once* — what can you mean ? ”

“ Thrown over Catherine,” said George ; “ why, my dearest mother, I never knew any thing of her affection for me till you urged me, the day before yesterday, to go and renew my acquaintance with her, and I — ”

“ Oh, well,” said Lady Frances, “ it's no use talking of Catherine at present. It was all mighty well to talk of her yesterday, poor dear thing ! but that's quite at an end now ; so let me beg of you not to lose time in arguing points which will keep for future discussion. Have you ordered the horses ? ”

“ No, no,” said George ; “ I cannot leave Binford without going to take leave of the Harbottles and the Lovells. I will order them at three o'clock, and so travel till late, and be in town by to-morrow noon.”

"Surely, my dear child," said her ladyship, "you cannot think of calling upon any body before you go; recollect your loss; so many relations lost at one blow. It would be in the highest degree indelicate."

"My dear mother," said George, "what indelicacy can there be in just —"

"Well, George, if you choose to do such a thing, of course —"

"I do, I assure you," replied George: "they have all been extremely kind to me; and as I cannot exactly fix the time for my returning here, I —"

"But," said Lady Frances, "you do not seem to recollect that you *had* actually left the place — were absolute gone, without taking leave of any body."

"That," said Lord Weybridge, "is precisely the reason why I am now so anxious to make the *amende honorable* for so gross a rudeness; so let me order the horses — say at four — and I shall be able to make my little round of visits, and then start for the metropolis, of which I have so suddenly become so bright an ornament."

"As for the Lovells," said Lady Frances, "a call there, except to leave a ticket, will be useless. The young lady has been recommended a change of air, and they have contrived to lift poor Mr. Lovell into the carriage; and the whole party have betaken themselves to Merrington, where the waters and the company, and all the other attractions of the place, are supposed likely to be of use either to him, or his daughter, or his sister, or some of them. I was surprised to hear of their movement, but they went this morning."

"Well, then," said George, who, truth to be told, rather doubted the history, "I can do a civil thing without much difficulty or waste of time. The Harbottles are here, I conclude, for they have friends staying with them."

"They are here," said Lady Frances; "but their friends, I rather think, have left them."

"Well, then, I'll be off on my tour of civility," said George, "and be back long before the carriage is ready. You have no intention of coming up to town immediately, have you?"

"Not unless I am wanted," replied her ladyship. "If I can be of any use, of course you will send for me—but till my mourning is ready, and all that sort of thing, I otherwise shall not quit the cottage."

Away went Lord Weybridge to fulfil his self-incurred engagements, and away went Lady Frances to write circular letters with deep black edges to every body who she imagined could be interested in the events which had occurred—events which, for more reasons than those which ambition might supply, were, in point of fact, momentous to her in the highest degree, as far as her comfort was concerned; for, upon an enumeration of the costs and expenses of furniture and fitting-up—calculated not upon the bills, for they had not yet been sent in, but upon the estimates—which made the matter worse—she found that she had so very far exceeded her original intentions, as every body does who begins altering and decorating, that her income for three consecutive years would not, if all appropriated to the purposes of payment, meet the charge; so that, in addition to the honour and dignity which had accrued to her son, and was thence reflected back upon herself, the supply of *argent comptant*, which his accession to the estates as well as title of his late cousin would secure, was a happy relief, for which she was really and sincerely grateful to Providence, lamenting at the same time, with every decent feeling of regret, the calamitous event by which her circumstances were so very much and suddenly improved.

Lord Weybridge, after having given directions to his servant about the post-horses, proceeded direct to the Parsonage, where he found that the history which his lady mother had given him was but too correct. Mr. Lovell, alarmed by the sudden indisposition of his daughter, had quitted Binford for the watering-place specified by Lady Frances; not more, as the servant told George, on account of the change of air, but for the purpose of obtaining the advice of a celebrated provincial physician, who was resident there.

From the Parsonage George proceeded to the Hall, revolving in his mind the scene he had last seen enacted in

the very path where Harvey and his beloved Emma passed him ; and, at the same time, considering how he should shape his conduct, so as to put beyond any future doubt or contingency his attachment and devotion to the lovely and exemplary girl. From the tenour of his confidential conversations with Harvey, he was inclined to anticipate any thing rather than an agreeable interview with the Harbottles. He hoped that he might encounter them singly : but even then he felt how much delicacy he must necessarily observe with her, if he admitted that Charles and he had met ; which, for many reasons, he intended to do.

He was fortunate in his approach. The Squire was out, but expected shortly in — Mrs. Harbottle was at home, and received him with her usual warmth and sweetness of manner ; but (certainly without anticipating who had been his companion for the last twenty-four hours) there was a consciousness of something on her mind apparent in her expressive countenance, which might have been a dread lest George should enquire after Charles Harvey.

The viper Hollis knew already, from George's man, that Charles and he had been staying together at Ullsford.

" I suppose," said Mrs. Harbottle, " that the intimate friends of Captain Sheringham must not venture to be so intimate with Lord Weybridge ? "

" So," said George, " my fame and title have preceded me, have they ? My dear mother seems to have taken as much pains as the gazette writers to proclaim my style and title. You, my dear Mrs. Harbottle, may depend upon it, that if I were to become emperor of all the Russias, instead of an humble English baron — for which title his imperial majesty, I dare say, has the most sovereign contempt — I should never forget the hospitality and kindness which I have experienced in this house, nor the many very, very happy hours I have passed under its roof."

" I regret to tell you," said Mrs. Harbottle, " that one of our once agreeable parties" — and here she paused for a moment — " is, I fear, extremely unwell : — Emma, I mean."

"I called at the Parsonage before I came here," said George.

"Did you?" said Fanny, her eyes sparkling with joy which she could not conceal. "Did you, indeed?"

"Indeed I did."

"I knew it—I knew it," said Fanny; "I would have staked my existence that you would; but Emma, who knows nothing of your elevation, Emma would not have believed me, if I had said so."

"Why should she have doubted me?"

"Your sudden departure —"

"Charles Harvey —"

"Oh, for mercy's sake," said Fanny, "don't speak—he—he has no more thought of Emma —"

"Hush!" said Weybridge; "for Heaven's sake do not agitate youself. He and I have been staying together the last day and a half at Ullsford, where, luckily for all parties, we met by accident."

"With him, Captain Sheringham?" said Fanny.

"With him?" replied his *lordship*; "and he has completed the friendly duty of entirely undeceiving me with respect to those appearances of that particular intimacy between him and Emma which cut me to the quick, and drove me from this dear, dear village, in which all that I care for on earth exists."

"Not at this moment," said Fanny; "but, pray, how did Charles—Mr. Harvey I mean—prove to your satisfaction that —"

"Ask me no questions," said George. "Satisfy yourself of his honour and mine. Be assured that both of us possess that feeling of devoted friendship towards you, with which, as I firmly believe, nobody who has seen and known your excellence and virtues as we have, can fail to be inspired. He is an excellent, amiable creature: he has won my regard and esteem in the two last days of our acquaintance; and I hope and trust, in spite of all the crosses and losses which man is destined to encounter in life, he will yet be as happy as he deserves."

Lord Weybridge flattered himself that he had got rid of that part of the subject in a skilful manner, without too

much exciting Fanny's womanly feelings: for it is impossible that any woman should divest herself entirely of interest in a man who once has been so dear to her as a friend — but he expected that those very feelings would have prompted her to make some little — very little — additional enquiries about him. She, however, disappointed the peer, and, with a prudence quite philosophical, checked her curiosity upon a subject to her of more importance than she desired his lordship to consider it.

"But of Emma Lovell," said George, after a pause, which he considered quite long enough to give his companion the opportunity of questioning him; "tell me, sincerely and candidly, when was she attacked by this illness?"

"The evening of the day *you* left Binford."

"And why, may I ask," said George, "do you connect *my* departure in the morning with *her* indisposition in the afternoon?"

"Because that," said Fanny, "and a conversation with Lady Frances on their way home from here, I believe to have been the cause, not perhaps of any serious indisposition, physically speaking, but of an indisposition to stay here, at least for the present."

"I have heard of that conversation," said George; "but tell me, when does she return?"

"You are serious in asking?" said Fanny.

"Perfectly and entirely serious, my dearest, best of friends," said George: "I have not a moment to spare here. I start for London almost immediately. I can have no opportunity of seeing her either before, or, I fear, soon after my departure. May I trust — may I entreat you, seriously, and from the very bottom of my heart, to beg and implore her to bear me in mind: tell her, that hurried away as I am, and uncertain of the immediate period of my return, I have made you the depositary of the master-secret of my heart; and tell her, above all, that if she encourages my pretensions, and favours my hopes, no human being in existence shall separate us: tell her, too, my dear Fanny, — so let me call you in the entirety and purity of our friendship, — that the gratitude I feel for her kindness towards me, as the humble unpretending person she

first knew me, has made me more anxious to make this declaration, the very first act I perform in my new, and, as the world will consider it, superior character ; and I entreat you here to bear witness for her and for me, that if she consents — I am pledged."

" She *will* consent," said Fanny, whose eyes were filled with tears of pleasure at the happy result of the acquaintance between Lord Weybridge and her friend ; " and I shall be too much rejoiced to send her tidings, which I not only know will gladden her heart beyond all others, but which have given me a higher idea of human nature, as far as you particularly, and men generally, are concerned, than I ever had in my life."

" Why," said George, somewhat archly, " all men are not exactly alike in their views and feelings."

" No," sighed Fanny, " I am aware of that."

" Aware of what ?" said a voice of thunder, which proved to be that of Harbottle himself, who came bouncing into the room, after having, under Hollis's suggestion, waited a minute or two at the door before he entered. " Why, Sheringham, my boy, how are you, eh ? — What's all this, Sheringham ? — you are a lord, they tell me, eh ? — that's a pretty go ! — ha ! ha ! ha ! — plenty o' money, I hope : — a poor lord's a poor thing ; — but I give you joy of your coronet, and wish you health and happiness to wear it."

" Thank ye, Squire," said Lord Weybridge : " I almost despaired of seeing you, for I am just on the move."

" Oh, to be sure," said Harbottle, whose fish-like eyes and bloated cheeks denoted that he had eaten luncheon, and was, moreover, out of humour ; " the moment I come in, out goes every body else. Well, so you saw Mr. Harvey at Ullsford, eh ?"

" Yes," said Lord Weybridge ; " he was there all yesterday with me."

" Did he tell you any lies about us ?" said the Squire.

" William !" said Fanny.

" William !" replied Harbottle ; " yes, it is William. What is that gentleman stopping at Ullsford for ? Did you bring any letter over here from him ?"

"My dear Harbottle," said Lord Weybridge, "I am not a general postman. Harvey is engaged to the Mordaunts for a day or two, and is gone over there."

"Oh, I thought you, — I beg pardon, your lordship, I mean, — ha! ha! ha! — might have had some message from him for *my* wife. They are very great friends, I believe."

"Indeed we are," said Mrs. Harbottle, trying to laugh off the barbarity of her boorish husband's coarse and barbarous remark, "and I hope we shall always remain so."

"Yes, I dare say you do," replied the husband.

"Well," said Lord Weybridge, "although I am bound to apologise, I am compelled to take my departure: my lady mother will rate me soundly if I do not attend to my own business, and what she calls the duties of my new station. So adieu, Harbottle, I have just been telling your lady that I never shall forget the kindness I have experienced here, and which I hope to be permitted to enjoy again."

"Ah, that's all mighty well," said Harbottle; "but I don't think we shall see much more of you, nor of Binford. I am sick and tired of every thing. You are a lord: if you turn out to be a rich lord, the chances are you wo'n't come near *me*; and if you are a poor lord, I shall laugh at *you*. My best days are over, Sheringham. We have had the devil to pay here, and as for your friend —"

"Oh, pray, spare my friends," said Lord Weybridge, who anticipated what was likely to follow; "never let us look forward in anticipation of ill — you have every thing man on earth can wish for, and I am going on, they tell me, to a similar fate. As Queen Mary said, when she lost Calais, that she was sure Calais would be found engraven on her heart after her death; so, if I thought I should never return to visit you again, I believe Binford would make an equally deep impression upon mine. Heaven bless you both! be happy as you deserve to be; and, as Hamlet's ghost says in his evanishing, 'Remember me!'"

George took leave of them both affectionately, but in going down the steps he added, in the ear of Mrs. Harbottle — loudly enough, however, to prevent the Squire

from supposing that it was a message from Harvey — “do not, on any account, forget my message to Miss Lovell. Remember, I rely on you.”

Knowing Emma's feelings upon this most important subject, it was not likely she would.

It is curious to reflect upon the wonderful difference which existed between the immediate pursuits of the three persons at that moment collected, and at that moment separated. Harbottle, reduced by the irritating malevolence of his spies into a state of mind distressing beyond measure to himself and dreadful to his unhappy suffering wife, had brought himself to the adoption of language with respect to Charles Harvey, in his conversations with her, which no company could check and no circumstances control ; and during the whole of that afternoon and evening, although one or two of his congenial neighbours dined with him, he could neither get rid of the suspicion that Lord Weybridge had been the bearer of some message from Charles, or check himself in the frequently recurring expression of that suspicion ; so that, what one would think, even if he really believed in the existence of any improper partiality on the part of his wife, it would have been his first object to conceal, *he* himself made the subject of remark at his own table, and of conversation at every other table in the parish. But the truth is, his mind had room but for one idea at a time, he had now got hold of one, and it entirely occupied him. His judgment never controlled his temper, and to his passions he sacrificed every thing — hence the brutality which his unhappy wife innocently suffered.

“Look upon this picture, and on this !” George, in the very heyday of life, full of spirit, vivacity, talent, and accomplishment, was quitting the confined circle of all these domestic evils for the great world, upon which he was to enter the next day, with all the advantages of rank and fortune. It is not quite certain whether this sudden uplifting of the commander, whom Harbottle had been pleased to patronise, had not added to the general acerbity of his manner. George, however, took no offence ; he regretted deeply what he saw ; for, coupling the severity of the

Squire's manner, and the subdued wretchedness of Fanny, with the ardent and strangely excited enthusiasm of Charles Harvey, he could not but anticipate a result the most to be dreaded ; nor did he think, in spite of all the young gentleman's protestations, that his lingering about in the neighbourhood — a fact much dwelt upon by Mr. Hollis — was altogether so indicative of his determination to abandon every idea which could militate against Harbottle's honour or Fanny's respectability, as the said young gentleman wished it to appear. It seemed to George (and he had seen a "*case*" or two in his life), by the alteration from what the Hall was a month before, to what it appeared at the moment he ran down the steps at his present departure, that if things went on progressively for another four weeks as they had gone on for the four preceding ones, he should have very little chance of running up those steps again, and finding the master and mistress of the house standing together at the top of them to receive him.

It is scarcely possible to describe, on the other hand, the effect which had been produced upon the spirits of Mrs. Harbottle by the visit of Lord Weybridge ; for although conscience, which makes cowards of us all, had hindered her from making the slightest enquiry after Charles, still, seeing the individual who had been his companion, in fact ever since he had quitted Binford Hall at her earnest solicitation, was something ; but much more was it that the unexpected meeting of the friends at Ullsford should have produced the much-desired *éclaircissement* of the apparent frivolity or fickleness of Emma, which otherwise it would have been most difficult to have brought about properly and satisfactorily.

It must be pretty clear to the reader that Fanny was not long before she seated herself in her boudoir to communicate to her dear suffering friend the whole of Lord Weybridge's declaration, made more striking to the poor innocent girl by the circumstance of her previous ignorance of his accession to the title. And the task was a relief to her, for she was doomed, unless, indeed, the Squire might have beaten up a recruit or two in the village, to a *tête-à-tête* dinner with her churlish husband.

But even in this innocent, and, as it could not fail to be to her, agreeable pursuit, she was forced, to gratify her anxiety, to despatch the welcome intelligence to her friend by stealth, and have recourse to stratagem to convey her letter to the Rectory, whence it was to be forwarded. For to such a pitch had Harbottle now carried his suspicions, that he would have insisted upon reading the contents of the epistle, which, if he had seen them, would have corroborated his previously expressed opinion, that his wife was making up a match between the "Captain" and "the Parson's Daughter."

Thus it was that mistrust on the one side naturally bred deception on the other ; and the present life of the Squire and his lady appeared to present rather a series of evolutions and manœuvres than the interchange of kindness and affection, by which it had been hitherto illustrated ; and, although the sufferings of Fanny were considerably aggravated by the sort of interference and *surveillance* to which she was subjected, there is no denying the fact that she herself had been the primary cause of all her subsequent afflictions.

Nothing can more strongly point out to women, situated as Fanny was, the absolute necessity of maintaining the straight course, deviating neither to the left nor to the right, than her own particular case. The moment her delicacy had been alarmed — the instant her mind was awakened to the state of her feelings — she acted morally, virtuously, and heroically — but this was in the second stage of the proceedings ; and, disguise it or palliate it as we may, Harvey must have become an object of much greater interest to her than he ought to have been, at the period when she felt it necessary to her character and comfort that they should part. Once admitted, the passion, so closely resembling friendship at its birth, goes on gradually gaining an influence, till at last — as was the case with poor Harvey — its victims awaken too late to a certainty of the delusion.

But to return to Lord Weybridge. When his lordship got to Dale Cottage, there stood the carriage waiting : he had been talking of Emma and himself, and had no idea how time flew.

"Well," said Lady Frances, "and now whom have you seen?"

"Oh," said George, "the Squire and his lady, of whom I have taken leave; but, as you told me, the Rector and Emma are gone to that infernal watering-place."

"I dare say," said Lady Frances, "you contrived to send her your remembrances through the Squire's lady, who is her great friend and confidant."

"I did, indeed," said George; "and I should have been very ungrateful if I had not. But, come, you say I must go, and the sooner, therefore, the better. You know how much I hate farewells and adieu."

"And yet you have been making them," said her ladyship.

"Yes, my dearest mother," said George; "but parting from a parent, upon an expedition like this, is a very different affair, indeed, from bidding good-by to a casual acquaintance."

"You *will* write to me the moment you get to town, George?" said her ladyship.

"Rely upon me," replied her son: "I will tell you every thing that happens; and if I find that any thing intricate occurs, I will run down to you and talk it over. Upon my honour," continued he, "now the moment approaches—I feel it to be one of trial and difficulty; my position is altogether new and exciting; but, strange as it may appear, I don't feel half so happy as I am sure I ought to be."

"Of course not, George," said her ladyship, "because the dreadful events by which you are so placed naturally disturb your mind. I hope, by the way, poor dear Lady Weybridge hadn't her beautiful diamonds on board the yacht with her at the time of her accident. I should not think she had."

"It makes little difference to me," said George, "whether she had or not. I want no diamonds; and I declare to Heaven, now that I am stepping into the carriage, to take possession of I know not how many thousands a year, I would, if I could afford it, give twice as much, if the people were all alive again, and I in the quiet possession

of just such an income as would support me comfortably with — ”

“ Catherine ? ”

“ Catherine be — hanged, my dear mother,” said the vehement baron ; “ you’ll forgive the strength of my language. No, no, I mean with her to whom I am sincerely attached, and — ”

“ Come, come,” said Lady Frances ; “ let Roberts call your carriage. Get away with you, you horrid Goth ; — and don’t talk of attachments to any body just now, except to me. Kiss me, my dear George, and begone. Heaven speed you in all your proceedings, and make you a better man, if there can be one, than your dear father was, as you are now a greater ! ”

Fervently embracing each other, the fond mother and dutiful son separated : — she retired to her boudoir to write more letters, and he dashed away for London.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

VOLUME THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

What was the message I received ?
Why, certainly the Captain raved
To dine with her — and come at three ;
Impossible ! — it can't be me —
My lord 's abroad — my lady too,
What must th' unhappy doctor do ?
Is Captain Cracherode here, pray ? — No !
Nay ! then 't is time for me to go.

SWIFT.

It may easily be imagined that Fanny lost no time in communicating to Emma Lovell the interesting and conclusive conversation which she had had with Lord Weybridge. She knew too well the real cause of her fair friend's illness not to be fully aware of the most essential remedy for effecting its cure. She understood the art of "ministering to a mind diseased," and earnestly pressed upon Miss Lovell the advantages of a return to Binford ; for although other reasons had been given to enquiring friends, Lovell was as perfectly aware of his daughter's true motive for quitting the Parsonage and changing the scene of her existence for a short time as she herself was. Fanny's letter, it was evident, would change the whole complexion of affairs ; and the devoted girl would anxiously desire to return to the spot which had derived intense interest in her mind, from an association with Sheringham, and which, now that he had declared himself, would bring back to her thoughts the pleasure she had experienced in his society, and to her hopes the anticipation of future happiness, instead of offering to her recollection only the bitter memorials of departed joy, and the still more painful evidences of his cruelty and falsehood.

Consistency, nevertheless, and a regard for outward

show, required that Emma's stay at Merrington should be prolonged for a few days. However, the period of, what now appeared to her, a banishment from Binford, was ingeniously abbreviated by the alleged impossibility of Mr. Lovell's being absent from his duty on the following Sunday ; and, therefore, on the Saturday next, the parson and his daughter were to return to their peaceful home.

Lady Frances, who had so entirely rejoiced in the absence of the Lovells during her son's flying visit, felt now perfectly secure of his escape from the clutches of his rural beauty ; for she was not aware that he had been favoured with a *tête-à-tête* in his visit to Mrs. Harbottle, nor was she sufficiently certain of the character of his friendship for that lady, to determine (even if she had known of it) whether he would choose to jeopardise his own pretensions to her favour, by making a confidence with regard to a purer and more serious passion ; but, above all, she was satisfied that the change of his position and circumstances would produce a corresponding alteration in his views and feelings, and that the flattery with which he would, as a matter of course, be assailed in brighter spheres and gayer circles, would totally obliterate the recollection which, at parting from her, he had confessed, of his entanglements at Binford, whether in the shape of friendship for the Squire's lady, or love for the Parson's Daughter. How far her ladyship was justified in these suppositions, we shall presently see.

Lord Weybridge, in passing through Ullsford on his way to London, staid just long enough to write to Charles Harvey, according to his promise, detailing the events of the morning at Binford ; and, perhaps, if Lady Frances had been permitted to see the letter which her noble son despatched to his young friend, she might have been disposed to doubt the results of his separation from Emma, which she so ardently desired and so confidently anticipated.

"Emma Lovell," said his lordship, in that letter, "was not at Binford ; she is gone to Merrington for her health. Was this necessary to add to the interest I feel for her ? How strangely accidents happen and coincidences occur !

I saw her not, nor have I written either to her father or herself ; but I have had a conversation with Mrs. Harbottle, which decides my fate. Yes, Charles, I have owned, admitted, declared my devotion to the dear girl ; it is now, as I meant it to be, irrevocable ; and lest any unforeseen circumstances should occur, or that, by repetition, the conversation I have had with her friend should lose any of its point or real intention, I here record my resolution, either to marry *her*, or nobody. Keep this letter ; register it amongst your archives ; and if I am forced or driven by a dangerous and powerful influence, of which I confess I live in dread, into any thing like a dereliction of principle, or a desertion of my resolution, I claim from you, as an act of friendship, the production of this declaration, unreservedly, unequivocally, and deliberately made.

" I would have given worlds to have seen her — to have pleaded my own cause — to have received her assent from her own sweet lips ; and yet, perhaps, it is better as it is. True love is always accompanied by respect and restrained by timidity ; the sentiment with which this bewitching girl has inspired me is so intimately connected with those feelings, that if we had met, the chances are, I should have been unable to use the language of adoration, which I should have been most anxious to let her hear, and thus have permitted my expressions to do an injustice to my feelings. Oh ! joy of my life — that I may by faith, constancy, and devotion, at last obtain the blessing of *knowing* myself not indifferent to you."

It must be confessed, that in this part of his communication there is no appearance of lukewarmness, nor any symptom of fickleness. In another portion of his letter he slightly touched upon what struck him to be the unhappiness of Mrs. Harbottle, and the "almost" ferocity of her husband. Upon every account, however, he was anxious not to excite Harvey's feelings upon a topic which had already too much interested them ; but, even beyond the desire he felt to preserve his friend from any decisive step which might produce eventual misery to himself, and probable dishonour to the being to whom there could be no question he was fervently attached, he was solicitous that

nothing should occur which might displace Fanny from the station which she filled in the world generally, and in Binford particularly, inasmuch as he felt how great a consolation her society must prove to Emma, and what an additional support and even respectability were given to her, motherless as she was, by possessing so amiable a friend and so valuable a chaperon as the Squire's lady.

After having left his letter to be forwarded to Harvey at Mordaunt's, Lord Weybridge proceeded on his journey; and having slept on the road, arrived early the next day, at the hotel in Brook Street, in which Lady Frances had always occupied rooms, and before two o'clock in the afternoon was seated in the chambers of Messrs. Wickins, Snell, and Sibthorpe, his late noble cousin's solicitors, in New Square, Lincoln's Inn.

It appeared that, by the unexpected annihilation of the entire family, the objects of the late lord's will were, as had been anticipated, totally frustrated; the fortune of his second son and his only daughter fell into the general residue, and all the personal as well as real property became George's. His regret for the loss of his relations, however natural a few sighs might be, was not greatly aggravated by finding himself set down for a legacy of five hundred pounds, and his mother assigned, as her share of her nephew-in-law's bounty and remembrance—a mourning ring. The testator had named two noblemen as guardians of his children, and appointed two executors to his will, which had been made seven years before his death. Both the executors so named were dead, and it appeared from some conversation which he had with Mr. Crabshaw (the tutor to his lordship's sons), that, a short time before his death, he contemplated making a second will, and appointing new executors. This, however, he did not live to do; and George, the heir-at-law, became possessed of the whole mass of his cousin's property of every description.

He resolved immediately to fulfil his late cousin's intentions, with regard to the few legacies which appeared in the will; but, with that exception, there he stood, who two days before, as a commander in the royal navy, was satisfied that his annual revenue amounted to one hundred

and thirty-six pounds seventeen shillings and sixpence, a peer of the realm, with a mansion in Grosvenor Square, two country houses in England, and one in Scotland, and an unincumbered annual income of forty-six thousand, seven hundred and twenty-five pounds, nineteen shillings and seven-pence — (*Vide* the last year's accounts).

After a long and laborious sitting with Mr. Snell, a most active and intelligent gentleman, his lordship returned to the hotel, fatigued with details, of which the results only were satisfactory ; and tired, like a bee with the load of his own honey, threw himself upon a sofa to “ think.”

The decencies of society, to which his mother so earnestly insisted upon his sacrificing at Binford, would, of course, prevent his proceeding thither again, and hurrying on his union with Miss Lovell ; and the dulness and emptiness of London holding out no temptation to stay in town, gave him ample leisure to reflect upon the one subject nearest his heart and dearest to his memory.

Long before dinner-time, however, a message arrived from his maternal uncle, Lord Pevensey, couched in the most affectionate terms, and despatched by courier from a place which he had in Buckinghamshire, congratulating and condoling, and begging him not to lose one moment in starting to join the family circle, to which there could be no objection, even in his supposed state of mourning ; and, before the man, covered with mud and anxiety, who had brought this invitation, could lead his tired horse from the door, a billet, tenderest of the tender, from the Duchess of Malvern, the dear friend of his mother, solicited him to make Rochdale Priory his home for the next few days ; as, although her son the Duke had not returned from Scotland, where he had gone for grouse shooting, her grace and the girls would endeavour to make it as agreeable as they could to him, especially Catherine, who would read to him, sing to him, &c. &c.

Immediately following her grace, “ *hauid passibus equis*,” came a three-cornered note from Lady Gorgon, who, happening to be in London, having only come into town the night before, and being about to quit it the next morning, implored Lord Weybridge to come to them, and dine *en*

famille. — “ They had no servants in London — but if he would — ” Maria-Jane would break her heart if he refused — and Louisa and Anne would scold her to death for not being warm enough in her invitation. And this note was signed by all the ladies. A postscript, in one corner, begging him not to mind dressing — “ come in your boots : ” — in another, “ not a soul but yourself : ” — in a third, “ *come, come, come,* ” all along the bottom.

George looked first at one of these, and then at another, and then at the third. Were these the people who formerly had driven their daughters into corners, when he approached ? Was this the lady who had even ordered her porter to exclude him from her house ? Were these the relations who had scarcely ever invited him into their doors ? Was this the duchess who once actually forced the Lady Catherine, of whom she now spoke so particularly in her letter, to quit his side, after he had led her to dinner, in order that she might sit by the bachelor marquess of the season ?

“ To my uncle,” said Lord Weybridge to himself, “ I certainly will not go ; and Rochdale is too far from town ; but I think a party *en famille*, with Lady Gorgon would be good fun, at least as much of fun as I ought to enjoy in my present season of mourning — this invitation I will accept.”

Accordingly, having sent off negatives to his rural friends, he wrote an affirmative to her ladyship’s invitation, taking her at her word that there were to be no strangers, and that he might come in boots.

Nobody could imagine, who did not know, the state of effervescence into which this brief answer of Lord Weybridge threw the whole family. More like Fates than Graces, the three daughters of Lady Gorgon had been, first one, then the second, and lastly, the third, dragged about to every possible place — balls, concerts, parties, dinners, fêtes, *déjeuners à-la-fourchette*, and *déjeuners dinatoires*. They had acted in private theatricals — stood and sat in *tableaux* — been all over the Continent — at all the best watering-places, in the best seasons. Two of them had been down in the diving-bell at Plymouth — the third had

volunteered an excursion in a balloon ; — Maria-Jane had given the Loyal Horsemonger Troop of Yeomanry a standard, worked with her own fair hands. The heads of all the three had been examined by Deville — they had climbed poles, and swung on sticks under Captain Clias — they all painted and lithographed — all spoke six living languages, and understood three dead ones — they all sang, and all played, and all danced, and all did every sort of curious work — and they all of them stuck prints on boxes with varnish — and all understood conchology, and ichthyology, and erpetology, and botany, and chemistry — and they all had albums — and all collected autographs — they all admired Pasta — and they all delighted in Switzerland, and adored Paris — they all loved yachting, and they all idolised the lakes — they were all enthusiasts, and all sympathetic in their tastes. But with all this, they remained, at the period of Lord Weybridge's arrival in London, precisely what they had been in the beginning — the three Miss Gorgons.

The provoking part of the affair was — for what pleasure is there without a drawback ? — that there was no opportunity for display — not one trunk, except those containing the ordinary run of drapery, was unpacked ; and the graces had to appear before their visiter in all the disadvantages of a *déshabille* : a trial to which the goddesses, who confidently anticipated the fall of their Paris, with great difficulty submitted ; but, as Lady Gorgon said, he had seen them often enough before ; and they might rely upon it, with a man of his lordship's turn of character, mental attractions were those which would most decidedly insure success.

" And now," said Lady Gorgon, " before we go to make ourselves ready for dinner — dress I certainly cannot call it — let me entreat you to recollect what is, I believe, within the reach of one of you. You are charmingly cordial with each other ; and it is delightful to see such unanimity. Indeed, I must say, there is not a mother in the world happier in her children than I am ; but you ought to remember, that, however much you may all admire Lord Weybridge, only one of you can possibly

marry him ; and, therefore, if, in the course of the evening, he should evince any thing like a preference, I am quite sure the good sense and good feeling for which you are all so remarkable will teach you so to arrange yourselves, as not to thwart or interrupt any conversation or little party he may think proper to make. I have so far broken my word with him about strangers, that I expect Count Alouette and young Doldrum. I thought it would be better to have somebody upon whom you might fall back in any case of emergency."

"Oh," said Maria-Jane, "I assure you, mamma, I have no disposition to interfere with Anne or Louisa : only, certainly he *was* very attentive last year ; and if you had given him any encouragement, instead of actually prohibiting him the house ——"

"My dear child," said Lady Gorgon, "how could I foresee — he was not within three lives of the peerage ! — two of them certainly better than his own — and he had literally nothing to live upon. Your fortunes, very respectable for gentlewomen, I admit, are in the world, nothing. And it is not in the world as it is in grammar, where two negatives make an affirmative — two nothings never make any thing."

"Oh, no," replied Maria-Jane, who seemed rather inclined to stickle for precedence, agreeably to her seniority ; "of course one could not know — only all I meant was, it was a pity ; because he really is a very charming person — so *very* agreeable ! "

"I remember thinking him delightful," said Anne, "that day at Lady Mallerton's breakfast."

"Well," said Lady Gorgon, "in conclusion, all *I* mean is, that, with the extraordinary friendship which has so long existed between me and dear Lady Frances, I should consider myself extremely fortunate indeed to have him for a son-in-law ; but I never will force any thing of the sort ; I am sure it never answers — it must all come naturally, and so I shall let things take their chance ; only what I intend to say — and I shall never touch upon the subject again — is, that I believe he is timid and shy, and extremely delicate in his opinions about women ; and if he

should find us agreeable and pleasant, and suitable to him, I should not like him to be driven away by any little *tracasserie* or idleness on the part of any one of you which might unsettle and disturb him. So now come, let us get ready for dinner ; for we have not a minute to lose."

Thus saying, her ladyship led the way from the drawing-room, and the graces proceeded to their several apartments to prepare for the meeting which they fully believed to be fraught with consequences of the greatest importance to their future hopes and prospects.

The silvery bell of the clock on the chimney-piece had scarcely sounded seven, when the ladies re-appeared in the drawing-room.

" Do come here, Anne," said Lady Gorgon : " what has your maid been doing with that head of yours ? why, I never saw — here, let me just turn that curl — there, so — why, my dear child, what a horrid pimple you have got on your cheek ; and, Maria-Jane, now do let me beg of you not to sit directly under the lamp — with light hair it wo'n't do — it wo'n't, upon my word. Louisa, my dear girl, *you* are not looking well — I don't know what it is — — I suppose it is the travelling — or the sea — or something, but — — "

The drawing-room door opened ; Mr. Doldrum was announced.

" How d 'ye do, Henry ?" said Lady Gorgon ; " how's Lady Doldrum this evening ?"

" Better, I thank you," replied Doldrum, who of shy young men was the shyest : — he bowed to the girls and blushed. Maria-Jane held out her hand to shake hands with him — take it he *did* — but shake it he did *not*.

" This is very good natured of you, Henry," said Lady Gorgon, " to come on such short notice. Maria-Jane said she was sure you would not mind."

" Oh, no ! " said Doldrum, and again he blushed.

" There is nobody in town, I suppose ?" said her ladyship.

" No, nobody," echoed the young gentleman.

" We came through the city last night from the

country," said Anne, "and there were a great many nobodies *there*, for we could hardly get along."

"Yes, a great many," observed Mr. Doldrum.

"You know Count Alouette, don't you?" said Maria-Jane.

"Yes, very well," said Doldrum; "that is, I never was introduced to him; but I have met him about, a good deal."

"He is every where," said Lady Gorgon; "and a charming person he is — he is coming to us to-day — he —"

Count Alouette was at the moment announced; and to be sure, as a contrast to the visiter who had so recently preceded him, nothing could be more remarkable. The one, red-cheeked, round-faced, heavy, dull, and awkward; the other, fair, pale, light, gay, and airy; his eyes sparkling with animation, and his countenance beaming with good sense and good nature.

"My dear Lady Gorgon," said the Count, whose accent gave a *naïveté* and piquancy to the merest common-places, "I am so shocked to be so late — dis comes of having a servant which loves to drive his cabriolet in de afternoon; my man shall have been to drive some ladi to whom he is fond in his cabb, and not to come back till so late as give me jost ten minute to dress! How do you do, Miss Gorgon? — ah — Miss Anne — to be sure, always well, — always pretty — always pretty well; — dat is good English — eh?"

"How is your beautiful horse, Count?" said Louisa.

"Oh, my war-horse, as de Duke calls him; he is as well as can be expected. I rode him dis morning. Your ladyship shall not have been out to-day?"

"No," said Lady Gorgon, "we are merely passing through town."

"Ah!" said the Count, "dat is always the way this time of the year: every body you meet in de street has jost come to town last night, and is to go away to-morrow morning."

"That is precisely our case," said Maria-Jane: "how long have you been in London?"

"Oh," said the Count, "I came last night — I am

going away to-morrow morning. I have been to Scotland to shoot grose — but I could not stay some time so long as I wish, for I have to make visit at Rochdale next Tuesday, when the Duke shall be back."

" Is not it getting late, Louisa ?" said Lady Gorgon.

" It is more than half-past seven, mamma," replied Louisa.

" Do you know Lord Weybridge ?" said Lady Gorgon to the Count.

" Yes, I did," said Alouette ; " 'pon my word dat is very horrible affair — a whole familie *abimé* in dat dreadful manner,"

" I mean the present Lord Weybridge," said her ladyship.

" No, I do not."

" We expect him here."

" Indeed ! "

" Oh !" said Anne, " I 'm sure you recollect him, Count Alouette ; don't you remember at Lady Mallerton's breakfast, I sat between you and him ? Lady Harriet sat next you on one side, and I on the other ; — and he next me — he was Captain Sheringham, then."

" Oh ! Sheringham ; I recollect him perfectly," said the Count ; " a very pleasant, agreeable fellow. Oh yes, I have met with him — 'fallen in with him,' as he would say in his ship tongue, several times — a very nice person — and *he* is Lord Weybridge — upon my word I am not so sorry for de late lord as I was ten minuets ago."

The senior servant of the establishment in town, here made his appearance, to enquire if her ladyship was ready for dinner — implying thereby, that dinner was ready for her ladyship — and whether her ladyship expected any body else ?

" Yes," said Lady Gorgon, " I expect Lord Weybridge ; we are not ready for dinner till his lordship comes."

" What can make him so tedious ?" said Maria-Jane, casting her eyes towards the looking-glass, at the same moment giving her ringlets a new twirl round her fingers, and refreshing her lips with a gentle bite.

" Upon my word," said the Count, whose delight was to

make English puns, "I should not think he had just succeeded to his title : he is de *late* lord himself. — Ha ! ha ! ha !"

" I dare say," said Lady Gorgon, " that he has a vast deal to do — an accumulation of family papers to look over — an extensive correspondence to maintain — indeed, coming into a fortune of sixty or seventy thousand a year landed property, at least, is a very serious affair."

" Agreeable, for all dat," said the Count ; " I should like to try."

" Yes, but a pleasure attended with vast responsibility," observed her ladyship.

" He is not married," said Alouette.

" Not he " — " no " — " he is not " — " Oh dear no ! " — responded several voices in different tones.

" You know Mr. Doldrum ?" said Lady Gorgon ; just recollecting that he was in the room, and that, however unusual introductions are, as it was out of the season, and the young man was shy and awkward, it might be proper to bring him and the Count acquainted.

" No !" said Alouette.

The ceremony was performed.

" I think," said the Count, " I saw you dancing at de last ball of de season, in May-fair, with dat beautiful Miss Lillesdale : — ah, me ! What a woman that is — eh ? — did not you find her quite charming ? "

" Very," said Doldrum.

" I think she is so clever, as well as so beautiful."

" We did not talk much," said Doldrum : " the figure was very difficult, and I cannot do two things at a time well ! "

" Oh ! " exclaimed Louisa, " then you are not at all like the Count, for he can do half a dozen things at a time."

" You do me proud, Miss Louisa," said the Count. " If I make some smile come upon your pretty face I am too happy ; — *toujours gai*, is my motto ; what is it in English ? something about — ah — I forget de words ; but it meant what I mean, and I always mean in English if I cannot speak him so well."

Here the clock on the chimney struck eight.

"Isn't it strange that George does not make his appearance?" said Lady Gorgon.

"Suppose, mamma, said Anne, who was the liveliest of the party, and by far the most active in mind and motion, "suppose you were to let a servant go and tell him we are waiting — you know his hotel is only in the next street."

"I would, upon my word, Ladi Gorgon," said the Count. "and so will you if you haf had no luncheon, nor nosing in de world to eat since breakfast."

"Upon my word I see no harm," said Lady Gorgon. "Henry, dear (to Doldrum), do ring the bell."

"An hour's law," said the Count, "in September is great deal. I am terrified to come so late as I did ; but dis is worse."

Upon the servant's appearance, orders were given that one of the men should step to Lord Weybridge's hotel — enquire for his lordship's servant, and deliver Lady Gorgon's compliments and say, she had been waiting dinner, half an hour.

"Don't you think, Lady Gorgon," said the Count, in a droll, half-suppling tone,—"don't you think the cook might begin to 'dish up?'"

"Yes ; — and tell them to serve dinner," continued her ladyship : "as for *them*," added she, "it sounds extremely fine — but I have nothing in town but a kitchen maid — all the establishment is at Grindell's, where I hope, Count, you will come and see us ; it is a place of poor Sir Alexander's own creation, but it is extremely pretty, and ——"

"Oh I know it perfectly," said the Count ; "Miss Anne's drawings make me familiar to him — and I shall be too glad to go — when shall you be there ?"

"The week after next, I hope," said Lady Gorgon.

"Oh do come," said Maria-Jane to the Count ; "I can show you some of the most beautiful shells in the world."

"And I," said Louisa, "have the most perfect love of a garden — to be sure it will be out of beauty at this season of the year."

"Every thing what belong to you, my dear Miss Louisa," said the Count, "is beautiful always — always."

" You 'll turn my poor girls' heads, Count Alouette," said Lady Gorgon.

" So as dey are not turned from *me* wen I look to dem, I don't care," said the Count.

" Cruel man," sighed Louisa, affectedly, " to be so indifferent to our utter subversion ! "

Here a pause ensued, which, in Alouette's presence, was odd enough.

" Have you seen the steam-coach in the New Road ? " said Mr. Doldrum, asking generally.

A general negative was the reply.

" It is very curious," said Doldrum, and sighed.

Another pause. The Count could not joke on an empty stomach. Doldrum could not joke at all. Lady Gorgon began to get fidgety, and fancy she had been thrown over by the new lord. The poor woman-cook was in a state of greater agony than any of them, and thought that her *soup d'essai* would be entirely destroyed by the procrastination of dinner ; and the girls began to look at each other, and doubt seriously whether their mother had really succeeded in securing the peer at all.

At length the servant returned.

He had been to the hotel. His lordship had walked away from the door exactly as the clock struck seven to go to Lady Gorgon's, and had not been heard of since, and his lordship's servant had gone out.

" How very extraordinary ! " said Lady Gorgon, " surely nothing can have happened to him."

" Perhaps," said the Count, with a comic expression of countenance, which made even the servant burst into a fit of laughing, " perhaps he is Burked, and his body sold for nine pounds."

" Upon my word," said her ladyship, " it is a very curious thing."

" I have heard, Miss Louisa-Jane," said the Count, " some of your friends called lady-killers, but if de lord-killers are about, what shall become of us ? "

" Who is in the hall ? " said Lady Gorgon.

" Stephen, my lady," said the man.

" Ask him if Lord Weybridge came here — it is quite

possible he might have forgotten something — or — yet — and there could be no mistake, because he knows the house."

"Oh, perfectly," said the young ladies.

This servant was just disappearing when another announced, "dinner on the table."

Lady Gorgon hesitated, but Alouette was on the alert, and with all that *gaieté de cœur* which so eminently distinguished him, exclaimed, "two gentlemen to four ladies — two to two — I shall take my lady and Miss Gorgon. Mr. Dol, Dol, (how d'ye call it?) drom, drum — take de oder two, and wid wide staircase we shall do — tree of a row — come, my lady, come."

They proceeded down stairs, Lady Gorgon distressed beyond measure at what appeared the result either of some unforeseen accident or premeditated affront; and having reached the dinner-room, the party seated themselves, their countenances saddened with a gloom which the vivacious expression of that of the Count, who entered upon the task of helping the soup with the most amiable alacrity, could not succeed in dispelling.

Helped they were, when Stephen, who had been doing duty in the hall as porter, entered the room to assume the task of waiting, since hands ran short.

"Stephen," said Lady Gorgon, the moment she saw him, "you are sure Lord Weybridge has not been here?"

"No, my Lady," said Stephen, "I am quite sure — that foreign Baron called a little before seven, my lady."

"Who is dat," said Alouette; — "Taganrag?"

"Yes," said Lady Gorgon.

"About dinner-time always," said the Count; "he has a good smell, I don't think, eh?"

"I said your ladyship was not at home; and about five minutes afterwards, *that* Captain Sheringham called, who used to call so often last year."

"Captain Sheringham!" screamed Lady Gorgon; "why Captain Sheringham is Lord Weybridge, the nobleman for whom we have been waiting; mercy on us, what did you say to him?"

"He asked me, my lady, if your ladyship was at home,"

said the man ; " indeed he was a-coming right in, without asking one thing or another, so I said you was out ; and he asked me if I was sure, for he was come here to dinner ; and I said I was sure your ladyship was not at home, and that you did not dine at home ; and then he made a sort of a sniff with his nose, because he could smell the dinner quite plain in the hall ; however, I persisted, and so at last of all he said, says he, my lady, ' That's uncommon odd,' and off out he went like a shot."

" Why, what on earth could induce you to do such a thing, Stephen ? " screamed her ladyship.

" Why, my lady, your orders to me when we were in town last year were — says your ladyship to me, says you, ' If ever that Captain Sheringham calls when I am at home, say I am out ; and if he calls when I am out, and any of the young ladies are at home, say *they* are out ; and if ever he calls about dinner-time, as he sometimes does, never let him in ; ' so I did as I was bid."

" Bid ! " exclaimed her ladyship ; " and what on earth shall I do ? "

" Eat your dinner, Lady Gorgon," said Alouette ; " you can do no good now ; never let nosing at all interfere with de gastronomie : he is gone to one of his clubs to dinner ; he will do very well, and it will all keep till to-morrow. It is a sad mistake, to be sure."

It was so sad a mistake that no dinner was eaten, no wine was drunk, no conversation occurred, and the ladies retired almost immediately after the dessert was put down, each to write a note of condolence and apology. Alouette, who enjoyed the defeat of a plotter and match-patcher, kept his dull friend Doldrum drinking a great deal more claret than either of them liked, and when they went to the drawing-room, they found that the graces had all retired for the evening ; one because she had a violent head-ache, the other because she had been up so late the night before, and the third because she had to get up so early the next morning. Café and Chasse were very soon despatched, and the Count and his heavy-in-hand acquaintance quitted her ladyship's mansion, more diverted with the amusement with which they had provided themselves, than with any

which had been furnished by their dreadfully disconcerted hostess.

Lord Weybridge, who could scarcely comprehend why he had been excluded, having, as Stephen judiciously observed, smelt the dinner, cared little about the mistake, whatever it was ; and seeing two cloaks lying on a table in the hall, and having also just seen a cabriolet drive from the door, and being convinced that there had been other visitors invited, took advantage of the blunder, stepped off, and, turning down Grosvenor Street, walked himself down to one of the once fashionably frequented coffee-houses in Bond Street, where it was not likely he should be known, and dined solitarily ; after having done which, he re-walked himself back again to his hotel.

Alouette's delight at this incident is not to be described : to find his old manœuvring friend, Lady Gorgon, foiled at her own weapons ; her pet lord excluded by a mandate of her own, which, being fulminated against the person of Captain Sheringham, was, according to her own special directions, put in execution against him in his improved state, was much too charming to be enjoyed by himself alone ; and he forthwith proceeded to Crockford's, to disseminate the *bouleversemant* of her ladyship's finesse by the plain dealing of her footman ; but he, like her ladyship, was foiled in his game there, for the coffee-room was deserted, and in the morning room (doing duty at that season of the year in the evening) one solitary individual only appeared, and he — was fast asleep.

Such are the *contre temps* which sometimes occur in the best regulated families, and such is London in the beginning of September.

CHAPTER II.

Should erring nature casual faults disclose,
Wound not the breast that harbours your repose ;
For every grief that breast from you shall prove,
Is one link broken in the chain of love.

LANGHORNE.

LET us now revert for a moment to the country. Four days had elapsed after the departure of Lord Weybridge for London, before the return of Miss Lovell to Binford ; during which four days, Lady Frances had considered it right to seclude herself altogether. Harbottle had two or three male friends shooting with him, and Fanny was left all day to the contemplation of her own thoughts. She, however, diverted her mind as much as possible from her own circumstances, by reading and otherwise employing her time, resolving meekly and patiently to wait until her husband's temper should amend.

On the return of Miss Lovell, the clouds which darkened the fate of poor Fanny were in some degree dispelled ; and if not happy herself, it was delightful to her to see how much happiness she had caused to her amiable friend. The declaration of Lord Weybridge seemed to afford a justification for Emma's admission of an affection for him, and a report which was pretty general in the village, that his lordship was shortly to return to Dale Cottage, set the heart of the Parson's Daughter into a sort of palpitation, to which, before she saw George, it had been a perfect stranger.

Two days more elapsed, and the report still gained ground. Lady Frances, after having exhibited at church on the preceding day a huge crape bonnet, and a spacious cloak, trimmed with all the emblems of grief, in which it was generally supposed her ladyship herself was personally present, but out of which she did not permit any portion of her face or figure to emerge, admitted Mrs. Harbottle to her sanctum on the Monday, Emma declining from nervousness to accompany her friend on her visit to the Cottage.

" My dear Mrs. Harbottle," said her ladyship, in a half sobbing tone, bathing her temple, with Eau de Cologne at the same time, " this is very kind of you. I have heard of your visits, but really the events of the past week have quite overset me. Did you ever hear of any thing so dreadful as the accident?"

" Dreadful, indeed!" said the Squire's lady.

" Poor dear Lord Weybridge," said Lady Frances, " was a very eccentric man ; he married an immense fortune, but a person of no family ; he liked her, and although she was very rich, those who knew him best said that her money did not influence his choice. She was a very odd creature — very odd, indeed ; the boys were fine lads, and the girl quite charming — with an aquiline nose and an oval face, and intelligent eyes, and a graceful figure, and a charming manner — in short, she was a Sheringham ; and to think of their all being lost — at once."

" It is extremely melancholy," said Mrs. Harbottle, trying to look serious, and as if she believed in the sorrow of her noble friend.

" And how have you been these last few days?" said Lady Frances ; " I must make much of you while I can enjoy your society, for I rather think George is coming here to fetch me away, and carry me with him to his place in Worcestershire, where I imagine, from what I hear, he means to stay till after Christmas ; thence I shall go to Grimsbury, according to annual custom."

" We shall not lose you altogether, Lady Frances," said Fanny : " it will be really too bad to have made us acquainted with you, and then leave us."

" Oh, we shall no doubt meet in London in the season," said Lady Frances : " I have no idea of immediately giving up this place — it is a *pied à terre* for me, and it is quiet, and I like it, and I like all of you here ; but of course George's position is altered, and I suppose he will scarcely return at all after his next filial visit. He is absolutely devoured in London : I heard a day or two ago from a very old friend of mine, Lady Gorgon, who tells me, that she and her daughters were *au desespoir* at his being prevented by some important business dining with them, after

having promised. She has three charming daughters, so accomplished and so delightful. Do you know her?"

"No, I do not," said Fanny, which was truth; not but, in the days of their unrestricted association, Lord Weybridge had given her and Emma a description of the whole family, which had the effect of entirely overthrowing, by anticipation, the little scheme of Lady Frances, of endeavouring to impress her friend with an idea that George had "some idea" of making one of them Lady Weybridge.

"I was delighted," said Lady Frances, "to see our dear invalid, Emma, returned, and at church. What a sweet dispositioned creature it is—so mild and gentle, and so amazingly well regulated. I wonder she doesn't marry."

"Binford is not very prolific in beaux," said Fanny.

"No—not in beaux," replied Lady Frances; "but there are a vast many persons in the neighbourhood who would make suitable husbands for such a girl—I once thought Mr. Harvey was rather touched in that quarter."

Fanny, who knew that Lady Frances never thought any such thing, felt herself grow particularly uneasy.

"And I really fancied," continued her ladyship, "the conservatory scene one night at your house would have produced a *dénouement*; and, perhaps, it did, although poor innocent I know nothing of it; for Mr. Harvey went his way very shortly after that evening, and Miss Lovell went *her* way—another way shortly after that."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Harbottle, "Emma is innocent of any attachment to Mr. Harvey: he told us he thought he had business in London."

"And, perhaps, my dear," said her ladyship, with one of those looks and smiles in which she excelled, "somebody else thought he had no business *here*. Hearts are strange things—there is no accounting for their waywardness and stubbornness."

"There may be no accounting for their waywardness," said Mrs. Harbottle; "but surely reason, religion, and a sense of duty may overcome their stubbornness."

"I hope no friend of mine," said Lady Frances, "will ever have occasion to make the struggle—however, I am

quite relieved about our young friend, since you tell me there had been no *tendre* between her and Mr. Harvey. I did not believe it, I confess ; for, of course, however much Mr. Harvey might admire her, with the fortune Mr. Harbottle tells me he has, and the prospects which are before him, he would not think of setting himself down at four or five and twenty with a portionless Parson's Daughter."

Lady Frances felt her cheek glow as she experienced a consciousness that she was sailing before the wind, ripping up and cutting down hopes and expectations, fully convinced that every word she was saying *at* Miss Lovell now would be repeated *to* her in half an hour after her visiter's departure.

"I am sure of *this*," said Fanny, "that if Mr. Harvey had been attached to her, and she had smiled upon *him*, he could have done nothing better or wiser than unite himself to a being so good, so amiable, and so charming."

"I don't know, Mrs. Harbottle," said her ladyship : "in society a man wants something more than a mere wife — poor Miss Lovell has no place in the world, and Mr. Harvey, though a man of fortune, is, you know, in fact, nobody — and I don't see —"

"Oh, then," said Fanny, "you think it necessary in a marriage for the world, that if the woman has no place of her own, her husband ought to be of sufficient consequence to give her one ; for it is invariably allowed, that however humble the young lady may be who is lifted to the peerage by a husband, provided she is amiable and good, the effect of the marriage is to raise her, without at all degrading *him*."

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Harbottle," said Lady Frances, "to quote the old proverb, 'When the sky falls, we may catch larks.' Who in the world could anticipate that poor Miss Lovell should be lifted, as you call it, in so extraordinary a manner ! peers are not so plenty."

"Why," said Mrs. Harbottle, "they have increased in number a good deal latterly, and some of *those*, at all events, might not be disposed to reject so fair an opportunity of happiness."

: " 'Ill-assorted marriages never succeed,'" said Lady Frances ; " and ——"

Here the announcement of Mr. Popjoy ended the conversation—that gentleman's attendance having been deemed necessary by her ladyship, and considered very convenient by himself, ever since the lamentable occurrence which more unequivocally contributed to her ladyship's happiness, than any thing that ever had yet happened in the course of her noble career, not even excepting the propitious marriage of her ladyship with her ardent and aristocratic husband.

Fanny took her leave, and proceeded homewards ; but if the lecture which Lady Frances had read in the carriage to Emma on the evening when they journeyed together from the Hall to the Parsonage failed of producing a conviction of her ladyship's sincerity upon the mind of that amiable girl, the conversation which had just terminated shared a still worse fate at the hands of the Squire's lady. She made every allowance for the plating of sorrow, which the mother of the new Lord Weybridge thought it right to put on ; but what with a slight knowledge of the world, a strong insight into human nature, and an intimate acquaintance with the sentiments and character of her ladyship's son, Mrs. Harbottle was so established in her dissatisfaction — to call it by the gentlest name possible — with Lady Frances' attempt at imposition, and the use of a principle of generalising, in order that she might make particular applications, that she felt no desire to repeat her visit, and rather — placed as she was in the confidence of both George and Emma — hoped that she might not have occasion to receive her ladyship again at the Hall before her departure — for in that particular the straightforward intelligence of Fanny discovered that her going was certain, and would take place forthwith, but that her ladyship, unwilling to have it supposed that her love of retirement had, in the first instance, been generated by necessity, or that the relinquishment of " her shady blest retreat " was consequent upon the change of fortune in her family, had determined to continue in the nominal occupancy of Dale Cottage for some few months longer.

Yet she *had* one bit of news for Emma — one drop of honey in the midst of the gall — George *was* really expected — this she could confidently communicate to her anxious friend, and *she*, who knew more of the real motives by which he was urged to visit Binford, was perfectly assured, that however brief his visit might be, the opportunity would not be lost, and that he would then complete the honourable work he had begun, and repeat to the amiable Miss Lovell and her exemplary father the declaration which he had, as it were, rehearsed to her.

Full of these agreeable anticipations, the Squire's lady drove her pony phaeton back to the Hall, whence she despatched a short, but very expressive note to the Parsonage.

At dinner Harbottle appeared to have, in some sort, recovered his good humour ; but it was impossible to ascertain his real feelings by his outward appearance, except when violent passion began to display itself. He had shot well — bagged four and twenty brace and a half of partridges, besides hares unnumbered, and rabbits innumerable. His three friends were bad shots, and he had been the crowning sportsman of the day ; altogether he was almost good tempered, and enquired, with considerable affection, after Emma — talked over the follies of Lady Frances, and concluded by hoping the Parson's Daughter would become Lady Weybridge.

And what could prevent it ? — apparently nothing.

George having received Lady Gorgon's explanatory letter, and three minutely explanatory *letterettes* from the girls, found himself tied to London for a week by inevitable business. He went nowhere — he avoided his family — he shirked society — he lay concealed, thinking not of the wealth and importance to which he had succeeded, for himself — but really and truly only as they would eventually contribute to the happiness and comfort of his dear Emma. What was the next step he proposed ? The instant that he could shuffle off the trammels of occupation, it was his determination to return to Binford, in the way to his place in Worcestershire, whither, as we already know, he proposed his lady mother should accompany him ; but, be it observed, Binford was by no means the direct road to Wor-

cestershire, and Lady Frances was quite old and independent enough to order her carriage, and pack herself up with her maid and her man, and find her way to Severn-stoke House (such was the Worcestershire residence of his lordship called), without either the protection or guidance of its new master. His point, his object, his sole intention in returning to Binford was precisely what Fanny anticipated : under the semblance of fulfilling a duty, he was resolved to accomplish the most ardent desire of his heart ; and at the very moment that Lady Frances was spinning her fragile web to catch the flies of the village, her son was preparing to take a step which would effectually sweep away all the cobwebs from his speculative parent's eyes.

"I have not seen her ladyship," said Harbottle, "since George's accession, unless, indeed, beholding that huge black bonnet and cloak which she brought into her pew yesterday may be called seeing herself. I suppose, Fanny, she is what I call uppish."

"She appears to lament the death of the late lord and his family," said Fanny, before the company.

"I dare say she does," said Harbottle, "as much as I lamented the death of my old uncle in the East Indies, who left me the best part of a couple of hundred thousand pounds. I had never seen the old chap ; he went out five-and-forty years ago, and took to the trick of shaking the pagoda-tree early in life, and shake he did, till at last he made as handsome a fortune as ever was screwed out of a free labour population. Bless their brown hearts, they are none of 'em slaves in India. They do their own work, eat their own curry, and smoke their own Chilums ; no doubt they do, according to our accounts here ; but I know this, I have got letters from my uncle, Alexander Marc Antony Anderson, who at last became what they call resident at Futtymungumleum, in which he tells my father rather a different tale. No matter. I remember the story in the Roman History, which I shan't repeat now ; but, as I say to myself, says I, when I cast my eyes round and see all my handsome property — Thompson, arn't those rosewood chairs beautiful, eh ? So they are. — Well, I always say to myself, what is it to me ? I did not see the blacks

work ; I don't know whether indigo is planted by slaves or free men, or whether cotton and rice grow without trouble ; all I know is, Paxton, Trail, Cockerell, and Co. stumped me up the money : and I declare, that if I had shammed sorry when I heard of old Alexander Marc Antony Anderson's death, I should have been as great a hypocrite as — I shan't say who, for fear of affronting somebody without meaning it. Ha, ha, ha ! ”

“ The circumstances of Lord Weybridge's death, with his whole family, are certainly very peculiarly affecting,” said Thompson.

“ I don't see that, T.,” said the Squire. “ Help yourself — don't miss the bottle — that's my best — I don't see that. Why the devil should a parcel of English lords go sailing about the Mediterranean in yachts, who had much better live in England ? If a man or a woman should be ill — if they find their healths benefited by residing in a warm climate, well and good. Health before wealth, says I. But here was this lord, as well in his body as any of us, posting himself at Malta — you might as well live in a stone quarry — with a jigermaree Isle of Wight yacht — hoarding his money — spending nothing at home — draining the country for rents to feed foreigners. I don't mean to say it's a judgment ; but, by Jove, I should not be sorry if he had been my nearest relation ; and as he isn't, and as his nearest relation is a deuced good fellow, and *my* friend, why, to tell you the truth, of the two I am rather pleased at it than vexed. Ha ! ha ! ha ! — pass the bottle.”

“ Lord Weybridge is coming here soon,” said Fanny.

“ Ah, so Hollis told me,” replied the Squire. “ Hollis picks up every thing, somehow. I don't know how it is — I suppose servants correspond, eh ? Well now, I shall be curious to see what he does with the Parson's Daughter. I'll take long odds he pops. I know, if I said so in the hearing of Lady Frances, I should have my head in my hand — eh — snap — bit — whipt off — but I *do* think so.”

“ I should very much rejoice,” said Fanny.

“ That,” said Thompson, “ is the young lady I saw here after church yesterday ”

"Exactly," said the Squire. "She and my wife are as thick as thieves, as the proverb goes: they know each other's secrets, and lay their heads together, to do all the mischief they can. However, it would be a great match for her if it was brought about. He is a good fellow, and she a good girl."

The turn the conversation had taken proved to Fanny that her husband, for some reason or other, had very much amended his opinion of her; for he never condescended to be what he called playful — and of his jocoseness the preceding conversation is a brilliant specimen — if any thing were lurking in his mind; and she left the dinner-table with a feeling of hope that brighter days were in store for her; that by the very means, perhaps, through which he had acquired his knowledge of Harvey's indiscretions with respect to her, he had eventually ascertained the nature and character of her conduct towards him. What it might be she could not exactly understand, but certain it was that something had occurred to calm him, and render him as durable as he generally could contrive to make himself.

A new era seemed to be beginning. The absence of Harvey had lost its novelty; and although she could not avoid thinking of him as a friend — and as she might think of him — she felt all the pain and anxiety which the measure of separation from him, on which she had determined, had in the first instance caused her, amply repaid by the conviction that she had acted wisely, and moreover by the assurance that her husband at length saw her conduct in a similar point of view.

The next day to this of which we are now treating broke up the party at Binford, and the Squire was invited to a day's shooting at Colonel Bradfield's, a neighbour within six miles, where another party were to assemble. This day Emma and Fanny had resolved to enjoy together, and in the mean while they abandoned themselves to the agreeable anticipation of Lord Weybridge's visit; and in a firm reliance upon his lordship's honour, and integrity, and principle, and affection, and the certainty of his redemption of the pledge which he had desired Fanny to give Emma, went into details which would have sounded most

unwelcome to the ear of Lady Frances, could she have listened to the discussion. So far, indeed, did their fancy lead them, that even the style of the bridal dress occupied some portion of their attention; and the important question whether there should be favours or not, was debated with an ardour and eloquence well worthy of St. Stephen's Chapel in its best days, where it is surmised the distribution of favours forms no very unimportant subject of consideration.

These two simple creatures, as Lady Frances held them to be — and if single-mindedness, straightforward policy, and a resolution to do good, are characteristics of simplicity, she most rightly judged them — duly appreciated the feelings and sentiments of the lover whose merits and intentions they were discussing, and an agreeable day they passed. The hours flew, and still they were talking on the one sweet theme. They had even ascertained — how I do not pretend to say — the day fixed for his lordship's arrival. Others had heard of it, too; and although he had been resident only for a short period at Binford, it seemed that the tradespeople of the place were actively engaged in preparations to give his lordship an agreeable welcome to Dale Cottage.

It was impossible, in the midst of all this excitement and the conversations which were going on, that Mr. Lovell himself could remain in ignorance of the real state of the case. Emma had never vainly or idly encouraged the idea that Captain Sheringham was seriously attached to her; but her watchful parent, who knew the world, felt assured, by the Captain's manner when in his presence, and by his daughter's manner in the Captain's absence, that their acquaintance was not of an ordinary or commonplace character. He knew his child too well to scrutinise needlessly into her conduct, perfectly assured that she would never be found erring from the straight path of rectitude. But she had felt it her duty to *him* to explain punctiliously the whole of her conduct with respect to Harvey; and had the happiness to find that her venerable parent, although admitting the delicacy and difficulty of her interference, entirely approved and sanctioned the

course which, at her friend's entreaty, and for her advantage, she had adopted.

The discussion of this circumstance it was, that produced a conversation in which the gallant Captain's name was frequently introduced, and the impression upon Lovell's mind at its termination was, that his daughter was deeply interested about the said Captain. He did not feel himself called upon to make any serious observations upon what she had said; but he, like Lady Frances, dealing in generals, had offered an opinion, that a girl, without fortune or rank, should be careful how she permitted her affections to be gained by a suitor whose means, however honourable his intentions and ardent his affections, were not adequate to the support of an establishment, and who, above all, was the son of a lady whose claims to patrician precedence would render the alliance eminently disagreeable, considering that it would afford neither consolation for her pride, nor alleviation of her poverty.

Emma received these side-winded lectures as her father wished. She restrained every hope and curbed every feeling which might induce her inclinations to rebel against the soundness of his doctrines and the wisdom of his arguments; and if ever she felt her affections for the only man she had ever loved in her life getting the better of her resolution, she brought to the aid of her philosophy the vision of the *visage du bois*, with which her noble mother-in-law would receive her, if she rashly consented to become the wife of her ladyship's only son.

Now, however, the case was altered. That son had gone the length of making a proposal — he was now powerful and wealthy. No longer dependent on his mother, it seemed as if the first act of his new life had been to ratify the preliminaries which had been almost exchanged, I believe, in his old one; and under these circumstances the two ladies felt no hesitation in admitting the excellent Pastor into their confidence, and receiving — as could not be well doubted — his entire concurrence in the marriage, and hearing his grateful thanks to Heaven that Providence had opened such a prospect of earthly happiness to his beloved daughter.

CHAPTER III.

The morning dawns with an unwonted crimson,
The flowers more od'rous seem; the garden birds
Sing louder, and the laughing sun ascends
The gaudy earth with an unusual brightness:
All nature smiles, and the whole world is pleased.

LEE.

I HAVE already stated that the Squire was engaged to a neighbouring *battue*. His parting from Fanny upon this occasion was a memorable one: the morning broke beautifully, and the smiles of nature, kindly bestowed upon his expedition, seemed somehow to have inspired him with a kindness towards Fanny, which she had hoped, in the consciousness of her own deserts, would eventually return, but the appearance of which she had scarcely anticipated at so early a period.

"Good-by, Fan," said Harbottle: "I'm off—the weather is charming; and if I do but keep up my shooting as I have begun, I shall, I think, take the lead at Bradfield's. Good-by. I shall be home at the latest by eleven to-night, and I will give you a fair report of the day."

"I am glad you return to-night," said Fanny, "for I want you to-morrow to go with me about a subscription for the Infant School."

"Subscription, Fan?" said the Squire, "rely upon it I will subscribe to the last farthing, to take care of the poor little brats. I think you will do me the justice to say, as far as money is concerned, you have never found me backward. I'm glad of it, too—it was wanted—you are quite right; so good-by. Give me a kiss, Fan, and I shall be home by eleven. Mind, now, nothing shall keep me—indeed, nothing can, for I have no clothes to dress, and no servant—no carriage—nothing but my chesnut, so I am sure to be back. Good-by—good-by."

And away he went, whistling loudly a favourite air of his, as he descended the staircase; and having hastily swallowed a cup of coffee and a slice of toast, he mounted

his favourite hack, and started across the country to Colonel Bradfield's.

Dr. Johnson said, as we are told by one of his biographers, that the happiest time in the whole course of a man's life was that which he passed in bed, in the morning, after he was awake: whether Mrs. Harbottle fixed the most agreeable part of a lady's existence at the same period, it is impossible to say; but certain it is, that the conversation of her husband, and the evidently returning kindness of his manner, afforded her so much gratification, that she felt her mind relieved from the dread which had been hanging over it for several days past, and, after his departure, turned her damask cheek upon her pillow; and sank into a slumber, such as, in truth, she had not enjoyed during the whole preceding week. Away went the Squire, whistling and cantering over mead and meadow, stubble and furze; sure of his chesnut, and careless of every thing else. He had, perhaps, been deceived in Harvey; but *he* was gone — that thorn was out of his foot, as he would have said; and Fanny was a good girl, and so handsome! Bradfield was a good fellow, and so hospitable! and the day was fine, and the weather was good for shooting, and his spirits were good, and, in short, every thing was exactly what it ought to be: and what a happy temper of mind to find himself in, going to join, as he was, an agreeable party, after his own heart! Never, in fact, did he leave home more contented or more comfortable.

"I am rewarded," said Fanny to Emma, "amply rewarded for all the sufferings I have undergone: William is restored to good-temper, which of itself is delightful to me — but doubly so, because I see in the alteration of his manner the effect of a cause; he has undeceived himself with regard to my conduct, and I look forward at least to a calm enjoyment of existence, brightened by a participation in your more positive happiness."

"I called on Lady Frances," said Emma, "on my way hither, and found her, of course, at home: I felt that I ought to call, that I could not avoid it; and I preferred going alone, because I thought, if she opened a series of

general observations and remarks bearing upon her son's position in the world, I could endure it better without having a witness to the attack, and it turned out I was right."

"Did she touch upon the subject?" said Fanny,

"Precisely as I expected she would," replied Miss Lovell: "she introduced it *apropos* to nothing; and told me that almost the greatest satisfaction she had received in his accession to the title was derived from the certainty she now possessed that he would be able to marry the person to whom he had for many years been attached — 'a young woman of the very first rank, my dear,' said her ladyship, 'whose mother would not hear of George's pretensions while he was untitled and without an adequate fortune; but now,' continued she, 'all will go smoothly; and I think it is such an advantage to a man of George's grade to marry — it settles him, gives him a character and respectability, and, by fixing him at home, makes him a better landlord, a better master — in short, a better member of society altogether.'"

"Her ladyship has already mentioned some duke's daughter to me," said Fanny; "and as she talks of the highest rank, I concluded she means that —"

"I suppose it must be the Catherine of whom she spoke to me in the carriage that night," said Emma.

"It matters little whom *she* means," replied Mrs. Harbottle.

"Yes, Fanny," said Emma, "it does; because, although Lady Frances talks in this way in order, perhaps, humanely *au fond*, to destroy any hopes or expectations which she may fancy her son's attention to me, during his residence here, have raised, it is painful for me to see the determination she has formed to lead or direct his inclinations into other channels: he is fondly attached to his mother; and in all she says about his rank and station there is, independent of the interest she feels for him and the influence which she must have over him, so much truth and common sense, that I own I dread its effect upon him when they meet."

"But, my dear Emma, admitting the power," ex-

claimed Mrs. Harbottle, “ what can it avail ? Suppose even that he himself were conscious of the weight of his mother’s arguments and the plausibility of her propositions, he has put it out of his power to yield to them ; nay, he has done so, neither blindly nor unequivocally — he has irrevocably declared himself, and registered his declaration in the very first moment of his nobility, in order to prevent the possibility of the success of his mother’s persuasions or entreaties.”

“ We shall see,” said Miss Lovell : “ to you, from whom I have no secrets, I frankly admit, as I have admitted fifty times before, that my future happiness or misery is involved in the result of this attachment, and yet my own mind has been so trained to filial obedience, and I hold the duty of a child to a parent to be so superior to every other consideration, that it cuts me to the heart to think that my only hope of comfort in this world is grounded upon a son’s neglect of a mother’s injunctions and his disobedience of her commands.”

“ My dear Emma,” said Fanny, “ we must not refine too much : nobody can deny the reason and justice of your views of parental authority and filial concession ; but when a man has arrived at Lord Weybridge’s time of life, he certainly is competent to form a judgment upon a point so distinctly and personally interesting to himself as marriage. A mother, to be sure, would be justified in interposing advice if she saw a son rushing into a connection either disgraceful or imprudent ; but — ”

“ Ah ! my dearest Fanny,” said Emma, “ like all the rest of the world, we are too apt to shape circumstances to suit our own immediate case, and to view them only with our own eyes. Rely upon it, however amiable you think *me*, and however worthy I may be of Lord Weybridge’s good opinion in *your* mind, the very case you have supposed exists ; and Lady Frances thinks that nothing could be more imprudent or more disgraceful, by way of connection for her son, than his marrying a poor Parson’s Daughter.”

“ Then she must be extremely silly.”

“ No — proud perhaps, and perhaps not prouder of his title, than of her son for himself alone ; and it is natural

— call it weakness — it is natural. Truth, and innocence, and virtue, and good conduct are not claims upon the aristocracy sufficiently strong to induce it to submit to an alliance so close as marriage — in every grade of society it is the same. Suppose, instead of the attachment to George Sheringham, which I admit, my affections had been obtained by some one equally gifted, equally good, perhaps in every point, excepting rank and station, would not my father have remonstrated, would he not have interposed his — ”

“ Advice, I dare say,” said Mrs. Harbottle, “ which you would —

“ Implicitly have followed,” interrupted Emma. “ I should have felt it right to struggle with my feelings, and make them subservient to my duty — how, then, can I complain if George should act similarly ? ”

“ He cannot, Emma — it is too late,” said Fanny.

“ Believe me, no, my dearest Fanny,” said Emma, “ I am the only judge on that point ; I know the generous enthusiasm of his nature, the warmth of his heart, the generosity of his disposition ; he has acted his part towards me nobly, and it becomes me, if occasion calls for it, to follow an example so honourably afforded me. If I can be satisfied, that his marriage with me is to cause disunion between him and his mother, it will be my duty, my pride, to make the greatest sacrifice a woman *can* make, and positively refuse my consent to a step which is to break the ties of nature, and separate a parent from a child — I am resolved, Fanny.”

“ I give you every credit, dearest girl,” said Fanny, “ for the exalted principle you possess ; for its exercise I am sure there will be no occasion. I have no doubt that Lady Frances will, at first, look grave, and even perhaps scold, but it will wear off — if *she* loves her son, why mar his happiness — besides, *she* herself married for love.”

“ Oh,” said Fanny, “ that's no rule to go upon ; persons in after-life are never more lenient towards the follies of others because they have committed similar follies themselves in their youth. On the contrary, they profess a greater severity, on the ground that they have purchased

experience, and are, therefore, entitled to speak strongly. Besides which, although Lady Frances married for love — and hateful to me is the woman who marries for any thing else — ”

This was one of those remarks which, in the warmth of eloquence, sometimes are made in conversation and meant to be general, but which, now and then, unfortunately prove, unintentionally, extremely personal. Fanny felt it — but she felt that Emma herself never thought of its application ; and, therefore, as all well-bred persons do, she considered the observation as rather complimentary than not, seeing that, if Emma had imagined it possible for her friend to appropriate it to her own case, she would certainly not have made it.

“ She married a man of family, from whom her son obtains a peerage — this makes all the difference.”

“ My dear child,” said Fanny, “ you make me quite angry — you are pleading against yourself, and anticipating results that may never happen.”

“ They must happen,” replied Emma, “ the conversations of Lady Frances have quite prepared me for all that — I plead against myself because I endeavour not to buoy myself up with hopes and expectations, the failure of which would, if I did, make my fate more terrible. I have, however, marked out the line I shall take, and traced the course I shall pursue. I feel myself placed in a difficult position ; but I put my trust in that which never yet has failed me, and, rely upon it, I will do my duty.”

Fanny, it must be confessed, was surprised and almost disappointed at the fastidiousness which her fair friend exhibited upon this point. Fanny's mind and disposition, pure and excellent as they were, had never undergone that discipline to which Emma Lovell's had been subjected under the watchful tutelage of an anxious mother. Fanny had never received that advantage ; and instead of the disinterested devotion which such a parent, as Mrs. Lovell had been, instinctively feels for an only child, she had derived from a governess — exemplary of her class — the care and attention which money can purchase, and a conscientious discharge of duty can secure. The difference between the

two courses of education it is needless to discuss. The one fitted its object for society, adorned with every accomplishment, and regulated by every principle of right, which tuition and precept can instil; the other trained its beloved pupil to the practical knowledge of every religious and social virtue, and transferred the piety and excellence of the parent to the fond and willing child.

And what was the result? Fanny, tired of her governess, and a home in which her father passed little of his time, accepted Harbottle's offer—certainly not because she loved him with that entirety of affection—that genuineness of feeling—that exclusive love, on which alone, when found, is raised a lovely superstructure of happiness—but because she did not dislike him, and did like the freedom and control which the character of wife would devolve upon her, and because her assumption of that character would take her from the regular and somewhat tiresome routine of walks and drives, and dinners *tête-à-tête* with Miss Gubbins, who was just sufficiently advanced in life to regret the days that were past, rather than anticipate with pleasure those that were to come.

Those who marry without loving, and fancy that love will come afterwards, are like sailors who put to sea in a gale of wind, in the expectation of fine weather. Fanny's case was a peculiar one, and involved many palliating and redeeming circumstances; and, above all, whatever might have been her real inducements or provocations to unite herself to such a man as the Squire, she had so admirably conducted herself as a wife, that the greatest credit was due to her, more especially as the course of her married life had been regulated rather by a sense of duty than prompted by a paramount feeling of affection.

How long the conversation of the two ladies might have continued, it would be difficult to say, had not the entrance of some "callers" put a period to it. Fanny, however, had engaged herself to dine with the Lovells at their usual early hour, as giving her more of Emma's society, without depriving her father of it; for the aunt, of whom we have already spoken, had been away for a few days during their

visit to Merrington, and was not expected to return till late in that very evening.

All that was proposed was performed, and Fanny returned home in better spirits, and happier, in short, than she had been for a long, long while. The Squire had not arrived when she reached the Hall. He had no servant with him, except one of his under-keepers, who had gone over to Colonel Bradfield's the night before. This man had already come back, and had reported to his superior that the day's sport had been excellent, and that his master had outdone his usual outdoings in shooting, and had told him, when he gave him his gun, that he should be home between twelve and one.

It was about that time he returned.

CHAPTER IV.

Farewell to virtue's peaceful times,
Soon will you stoop to act the crimes
Which thus you stoop to fear:
Guilt follows guilt; and where the train
Begins with wrongs of such a stain
What horrors form the rear!

AKENSIDE.

"Who's there?" said Emma Lovell, suddenly awakened from her sleep by some one hastily knocking at her bed-chamber door very early in the morning—"who's there?"

"'Tis I, dearest Emma," replied a voice, which she instantly recognised as Fanny's.

It is needless to say how speedily the summons was obeyed. Fanny—pale as death, and trembling from head to foot—tottered into the room, and sank almost lifeless on the bed.

"In mercy's name, tell me," said Emma, "what has happened. What brings you here?"

"No—no," said Fanny, "never—never—you must not hear what I have to tell. Give me some water—

give me something to save me from dying at your feet. Ruin — ruin and desolation have fallen upon us. I must see your father, Emma, as soon as possible — instantly, if I can — to *him*, to *him* alone can I confide my story : he must hear it."

" But why am I excluded from your confidence ? "

" Ask me not, Emma — it must be so."

" Has any thing happened to your husband ? "

" Happened ? " exclaimed Fanny, with a look of horror such as never yet had Emma seen upon her countenance — " no — no — nothing has happened. All I entreat — all I beg — is to see Mr. Lovell. I know his early habits — he is no doubt up ? "

" You shall see him instantly," said his daughter. " But am I to know nothing more ? "

" You will know all too soon," said Fanny. " Only let me see your father — confide in him — consult him, and act upon his advice. Oh ! Emma, Emma, into the house I have just left, never — never more can I enter."

" My dearest friend, calm yourself."

" I shall be better — calmer — quite myself — after I have relieved my heart of the horror which oppresses it. Oh ! Charles, Charles — "

Here her utterance was stopped, till her agony was alleviated by a flood of tears. Emma was terrified — her mind was prepared for something dreadful ; but all this agitation — the resolution never to return to her home and her husband, coupled with the name of Charles, disarmed — unnerved her — and she determined to accelerate the interview which Fanny seemed so anxious to have with her venerable parent. To him, thought Emma, she is willing to reveal some horrid history — to him she dare not communicate that which I may not hereafter hear ; to me, presuming upon our friendship, upon the affection she knows I bear her, she might entrust some secret which I dare not keep, or ask some confidence I might not grant.

Hurrying, therefore, to her dressing-room, Emma threw on her *robe de chambre*, and flew, rather than ran, down stairs, to her father's door, to communicate the unexpected arrival of Mrs Harbottle, and the urgency of her desire to

see him. All was as it should be. Lovell had been up and dressed already more than an hour, and he desired Emma to bring Fanny to him in his own little library.

When Emma returned to her room, she found Fanny kneeling at the foot of the bed, in the act of prayer ; but so wild was her look, so incoherent were her expressions, that she could not endure the spectacle presented to her eyes. Question her she dare not, lest she should hear, as she sadly anticipated, the disclosure of some event which perhaps might for ever separate her from her much loved friend.

" My father will see you now, dearest Fanny," said Emma.

" Thank God for *that!*" sobbed the wretched woman.

" Lean on *me*," said Emma. " Come to him — come."

" Oh !" said Fanny, as she passed along, " what a contrast does this house of piety and virtue afford to that which yesterday was mine ! "

Again were Emma's ears stung by an observation which pointed, as she felt, but too clearly to the nature of the calamity which she dreaded.

" Come, come," said Emma ; and leaning on her friend's arm, the half-dead Fanny reached the library without uttering a syllable. She threw herself into a chair, and covering her face with her hands, burst into a flood of tears — nobody spoke. Lovell felt that it was best to let her grief have way ; and Emma, adown whose pale cheeks the tears were also streaming, stood by her friend, and cast upon her a look of wonderment and pity, not unmixed with fear for her discretion.

After a minute or two she raised her head — her eyes fastened themselves upon the pious master of the house, and again she relapsed into her former excess of grief.

" I cannot — cannot speak it" — sobbed the unhappy woman — " where is Emma ? "

" Here, dear," said Miss Lovell.

" You must go — Emma, dearest, you must leave us," said Fanny. " One — only one person must hear it — and that one must be your father. That alone can save

me — save me from horror — from myself — from madness."

Lovell motioned for Emma to leave the room. She obeyed, but as she parted with the fevered hand of Fanny, she kissed her forehead, and inwardly feared she had done so for the last time.

When they were alone, Fanny's first precaution was to be assured that it was impossible for human ear to catch the sound of her voice. Her trepidation was such, that with difficulty could she make herself intelligible. Their interview lasted upwards of an hour. What transpired while it endured, it is not for any person, except the parties concerned in it, to know. Fanny unburdened her oppressed spirit ; and when she came forth from the library, leading Mr. Lovell into the breakfast-room, (for during the last few weeks he had regained sufficient use of his limbs to move, with assistance, from one apartment to another,) calmness and resignation were painted on her countenance, such as could not have rested there had Emma's apprehensions been justified ; besides, to see her thus associated with her parent, and led by him into their family circle, at once convinced, and soothed, and charmed her. She scarcely anticipated the events which were so speedily to follow.

Fanny endeavoured to rally her spirits sufficiently to sit at the table while the family breakfast was in progress ; but the effort was too much, and she quitted the room and went to Emma's boudoir, where she entreated to be left alone ; and as she left the parlour, her words to Lovell were — " For all the rest, my best of friends, I trust to you."

" What is the meaning of all this ? " said Emma, when she returned ; " am I really not to know ? "

" Eventually, Emma, you will — you *must* know all," said Lovell ; " but when I tell you that, for your friend's sake, I am going not only to make one of the greatest sacrifices that can be made by *me*, but that I am going to ask a sacrifice of you, being unable, at the present moment, to tell you my motives for such a course, you will, per-

haps, be more discontented still. In general terms I can explain the principle upon which I act: to your own good sense, and your reliance upon my good judgment—putting any thing like parental control at the moment out of the question—I trust for your seeking no further."

" You have only to express your wishes, sir," said Emma.

" My dearest child, I know it," said Lovell. " Now, hear me. You already know that our poor afflicted friend has quitted her home and the protection of her husband. Why she has done so, it is impossible you should know—it is impossible that any body should know. Her reasons are unanswerable—her motives, unimpeachable; but such is the world, that though she be excellent and exemplary in every relation of life, the step she has taken, unless she is publicly and evidently supported in it, ruins her eternally. If it were practicable for her to remain in Binford, this house should be her home; but that is impossible. The sacrifice I myself am about, for her sake, to make, is that of your society for a short time. The sacrifice I ask *you* to make to friendship, and the happiness and respectability of your friend, is, that you should be her companion in a journey which she proposes to begin immediately, to visit an aunt in the west of England, whom she has never seen since she was a child, and who has not visited London for upwards of forty years."

" Me!—I take a' journey!"—said Emma, all her thoughts instantly reverting to the one anxiously looked-for event—that of Lord Weybridge's arrival at Binford.

" I told you I should ask as well as make a sacrifice," said Lovell; " but the moment I had assured myself that nothing else could save our friend, I resolved on performing *my* share of the duty; I think I shall find no difficulty in persuading you to accomplish *yours*."

" Let me but feel it a duty, sir," said Emma, " and this instant I am ready to undertake whatever you wish."

" It is a duty, Emma," said Lovell; " for I require it of you: but as I am sure your feelings of friendship for our poor friend are warm and enthusiastic, when I tell you that the step I suggest will insure her respectability, and,

no doubt, an affectionate reception at the house of her relation, and that nothing else, as I see it, can avert a ruin so complete and tremendous in all its consequences, that I dare not contemplate it — I do think — ”

“ Think ! ” interrupted Emma, “ do not think — be certain, father. Sanctioned by your approbation, strengthened by your support, I would traverse the world for Fanny’s sake. And, oh ! my dearest sir,” continued she, “ what a weight of pain and doubt you have, by those few words, lifted from my heart ! Knowing the fallibility of our nature, and aware of the trials to which my suffering friend has constantly been subject, I dreaded — ”

“ Dread nothing, Emma ! ” said Lovell : “ after what I have suggested as the course of conduct for you to pursue, your confidence in Fanny may be as unbounded as your reliance is on me. She is, she must be, miserable ; but she is excellent in all her views, in all her thoughts. Even at a moment when every passion and feeling to which human nature is liable has been called into action, her conduct is above praise. One condition of the journey is, that it must be begun immediately — in an hour — in short, before Mr. Harbottle returns home.”

“ Is he not aware — ”

“ Hush ! — no questions, my child,” interrupted Lovell. “ In *my* carriage, with *your* maid, and one of *my* servants, you must undertake the expedition. From the Hall Fanny will neither take servants, nor any thing that ever has been in it. She goes — not for a transient visit, but for EVER ! ”

“ For ever ? ”

“ Ay, for ever,” said Lovell ; “ and with my sanction, and under my advice — ”

“ But her husband — ”

“ Him I shall see after your departure,” said Lovell ; “ and him I will bring to the opinion which I at present hold : but as you know that I should never deny you any information, which with safety I could impart to you, so you will be satisfied with this assertion ; and let me entreat of you — that is, if you undertake this extraordinary journey — that, during its progress, you will not press

Fanny upon any subject at all connected with her departure from home. The less she tells you, the better for both of you."

" My dearest father," said Emma, in tears, and ready to fall at his feet, " pardon me, pray — pray, pardon me — doubt you, who could? — and how, of all created beings, I? But one question do answer me. I am sure — quite sure — that our dear Fanny is right — that something terrible has happened — some dreadful quarrel between her and her husband; — and I have no doubt — *no* doubt, dear father, that she has been ill treated, and will be eventually justified in all she does. But do, do tell me — if I may know it — is Charles Harvey in any degree — — "

" Emma," said Lovell, " never name his name to her — — "

" I should not have named it now, but that she called on it unconsciously when up-stairs, and — — "

" Hush! hush! hush!" said Lovell: " if she unconsciously called upon his name, notice it not — neither to her nor to any one else. She must have wandered — she must have been dreaming. Dismiss him from your thoughts, my child: — above all, keep his name from your lips during your progress. Remember, if she speak of him — if she tell you all that *I* know — listen, but urge her not. I have advised her to keep her story secret from all but the one to whom it was necessary she should confide it. It is a dreadful history, Emma, and you are better without the knowledge of it. She, being sincere, as I know she is, had better not confide it even to you. Thus much, if, as I know you do, you value her happiness dearly, you may tell her, whenever she evinces a disposition to admit you into her confidence. I repeat to you, that I have advised her not to tell even *you*. Having said this, I leave you together, secure in the virtue and forbearance of the one, and in the exemplary principle and devotion of the other. Go your way together — press her to your bosom when you meet again, and say your father has told you, adoring *you* as he does, that you are worthy to be friends eternally."

This was a trial for female curiosity, far and away be-

yond the natural interest which Emma really felt for her friend. She had quitted her home and husband *for ever*; in her mental wanderings she had called upon the name of the man whose name had not been agreeably associated with her's—that name was never to be mentioned to her—and yet she was blameless—and, even upon the strength of her separation from her husband, rendered, as her father had told her, more worthy than ever of being the friend of his darling daughter. This *was* a mystery.

And poor Fanny!—Oh! that we dare contemplate the state of her mind—oh! that we might enter into all those generous, kindly, womanly feelings, by which the suffering angel was actuated. No one who did not know what had occurred, could even imagine the extent of her sufferings—yet how beautiful is the security of religion!—how cheering, how charming, the feeling of admiration for the piety of others, to which our smaller pretensions dare not with confidence aspire!

In her own mansion—the scene of wealth, of gaiety, of dissipation, and once of happiness—her mind was distracted; she was fevered, agitated, tormented—her heart anxiously beating and almost bursting till she made a disclosure of circumstances the most appalling and distressing—distressing in every point of view—and in the midst of this tremendous whirl of feeling, and passion, and horror—for there was horror mingled in it—she fled to Lovell; and in the house of that excellent man, strengthened by his support—cheered by his exhortations, and soothed by his condolence, she rested her aching head upon the sofa in Emma's room, and even slept awhile. Such is the tranquil security with which the slumber of the erring sinner is blessed beneath the roof of the truly pious man of God!

No time, it appeared, was to be lost before the departure of the ladies upon this most extraordinary pilgrimage to Somersetshire. Lovell's carriage, which seldom saw the light, but which luckily had conveyed him and his child to Merrington the preceding week, was sooner ready for service than it would have been if he had not made that excursion. At other periods, sundry of the gallinaceous

breed of birds were in the habit of using the outside of it as a resting or roosting place, they being enabled by certain dilapidations in the coach-house to make good a "settlement" thereupon.

Difficulties seemed to vanish before the required exertions of the establishment, like Alpine snow before the acid of Hamilcar's son ; and in less than an hour the travelling chariot of the reverend Rector might have been seen rolling away from the Rectory-door, containing Fanny and Emma inside, bearing also Miss Stevens, Emma's maid, and Wilson, the Rector's servant, without. Lovell bade them an affectionate adieu, and away they went.

CHAPTER V.

— A crowd of thoughts
Doubting, discordant, tumult in my breast,
Unsettling my resolves — what should I think ?
Suspicion may enquire, but must not judge.

MALLET.

WHEN one is engaged simultaneously in three different pursuits, the appropriation of time is somewhat difficult, and, at the present moment, having a good deal to say to the reader, I can hardly decide whether to carry him to London to the hotel, which has the honour of numbering the Right Honourable Lord Weybridge amongst its distinguished inmates ; or take him to Dale Cottage, whose humble thatch has the supereminent gratification of covering the aristocratic head of Lady Frances Sheringham ; seat him in the carriage "bodkinized" between the two fair ladies travelling rapidly westward ; or bring him *tête-à-tête* with the Reverend Mr. Lovell in the Rectory, and so let him hear the repetition of the very extraordinary and important conversation which took place shortly after

Fanny's departure between that reverend gentleman and the Squire.

According to the order of things by which the world is regulated and arranged, the peer should precede—but,

“ When a lady 's in the case
—All other things of course give place.”

And, accordingly, we will first endeavour to find out the subject of Mrs. Harbottle's travelling dialogue with her fair and devoted friend.

It may easily be imagined, that, after having taken so decisive a step as quitting her father's house at a moment's notice, to undertake a long journey with an abdicating wife, Emma's anxiety to hear the real cause of such a measure explained was not little. She was assured by the manner in which her excellent parent had urged her to accompany Mrs. Harbottle, that it was right and just that she should do so, and it was from no feeling of apprehension as to the appearance such a proceeding might have in the eyes of the world—of Binford, that her desire for “ further particulars” was excited; but she really longed to know for the mere pleasure of knowing, and for the satisfaction of feeling that she was entirely trusted.

Indeed, considering all things, she felt that it was no more than her right to be informed upon every point connected with the separation, to the propriety and necessity of which she had—under command—lent the whole weight of her character and countenance; but, however just Emma's feelings might have been, and however undeniable her claim upon Fanny for an entire and implicit confidence, she was not destined to be satisfied during their expedition.

Three or four times during the morning she had endeavoured to break the ice; but Fanny, who for hours was absorbed in the deepest grief, relieved only by bursts of tears, uniformly checked that disposition to enquire, which she saw gradually increasing, on the part of her companion. At length Emma, having permitted her friend to indulge in her fruitless sorrow, ventured again to urge her to give her only the outline of the circumstances which had oc-

curred, and which had conspired so suddenly to induce the desperate step she had taken.

"Emma," said Fanny, "I am conscious, perfectly conscious, that you who have made such a sacrifice for my welfare and happiness—a sacrifice for which no gratitude of mine—no, not the devotion of a whole life to *your* service, could compensate—are fully entitled to hear every circumstance connected with our journey; but when I declare to you that nothing but horror and destruction could result from the disclosure of any part of the occurrences of last night, I am sure you will place so much confidence in *me* as not to press me to detail them—or even to allude to them."

"My father knows them," said Emma.

"It was absolutely necessary that some one person should be in possession of them," said Fanny, "else I could not have justified my present conduct. Your father, by his age—his character—his profession—by all his virtues—and all his tenderness to error—was the only being I could select for the depositary of my dreadful secret: a second confidence would be ruinous."

"But surely, dearest Fanny," said Emma, "if my father knows the secret, you do not imagine that he will not some day tell me what it is."

"The day," said Fanny, "may—must come when it may be told—but better it be for ever buried in oblivion—from these lips never syllable shall be uttered connected with it. I have separated from my husband on account of the incompatibility of temper—your father justifies the view I have taken of the case; and as a proof that he does so, and as a pledge to the world of my propriety and innocence in the separation, affords me the friendship and society of his dear and exemplary daughter. The world—if any of the world should trouble themselves to talk or think about me—dare not whisper a syllable to my prejudice. That they should be equally tender to my husband's character I sincerely wish. We are parted—there is the simple fact—and—I repeat the words—from incompatibility of temper."

Fanny was scarcely able to maintain her firmness during this attempt at rallying her spirits, and asserting her fear-

lessness and independence of the world, and, at its conclusion, again burst into an agony of tears.

"But," said Emma, recurring to the subject with a perseverance worthy of a better cause—as soon as Fanny was somewhat recovered—"but surely some other form or ceremony is necessary to effect a separation, so entire as you propose, between a married couple, than the mere will of the wife. Mr. Harbottle may—and will, I dare say—follow and claim you from your aunt, and —"

"No, no, Emma, not he," said Fanny.

"I am sure, Fanny," said Emma, "that with all his faults and all his irritability, he is devotedly attached to you—proud of you—and unless something which it is impossible for me even to imagine has happened —"

"There has, there has," interrupted Fanny, wildly—"my dearest child, there has—he never will follow me—he never will see me more—he will learn to hate me—and—there an end —"

"Now," continued Emma, who in her heart wished to lead her companion into a train of conversation whence she might discover some faint glimmering of hope that an eventual reconciliation between her and her husband might take place—"in all those *brusqueries* of his about Charles Harvey —"

"Oh! mercy, mercy, mercy!" exclaimed Fanny, with a wildness in her eyes such as Emma had never yet seen:—"spare me—spare me *that*. Never—never repeat that name—oh, Emma—Harvey—Harvey—Harvey!"

Again she relapsed into her former state of wretchedness, leaving Miss Lovell considerably more surprised than satisfied with the talismanic effect which the name of Harvey evidently had upon her companion. It was clear to her, that the suspicion which she had all along entertained, that the preceding night's quarrel between the Squire and his lady originated in some observation about her conduct towards Charles, was correct; but she was not prepared to find the lady so violently affected by the mere mention of the name of a man, for whom she had to herself, only a few days before, denied any thing like an indiscreet affection, at the moment of all others when she was anxiously

vindicating her separation from her husband, on the ground of her own propriety and virtue.

Surely, thought Emma, while Fanny still lay absorbed in her misery—surely she could not have seen Charles Harvey—he could not have visited Binford in her husband's absence! Even if he had ventured upon conduct so imprudent and improper after what has passed, she would not have admitted a visit from him. Besides, she was at the Rectory until late in the evening—it was, therefore, impossible. And so it seemed—and most impossible of all, because the Rector would not have considered a quarrel with Harbottle, upon such a subject, a justifiable ground for his wife's abandonment of him.

"Emma," said Fanny, some time afterwards, faintly and fearfully, "have I been wandering—talking idly? have I named names—spoken of persons? I surely have been dreaming—I feel sick and weary—my head is splitting."

To Emma it appeared that Fanny was growing delirious—the agony of her mind was visible in the impassioned expression of her countenance, and it was evident that rest was absolutely necessary for her. Emma proposed that they should stay the remainder of the day, and sleep at the next stage, if the inn promised such accommodation as they might approve of. Her proposition to that effect was received by Fanny with complacency, and the observation which she made in giving her assent, "that now, all places in the world were alike to her," from its character, and the tone in which it was delivered, increased rather than diminished the apprehension which had latterly been growing in Emma's mind—that Fanny had not confided the truth, or if the truth, not the whole truth of the cause of the quarrel to her father.

How could such an ungenerous suspicion haunt an innocent mind, the reader will naturally ask. But let him consider the circumstances, and the doubt which hung over Emma will be found to be extremely natural. Fanny had made her a confidant in matters connected with this very Charles Harvey, of a nature as delicate as they well could be, and still maintaining the character of honour and pro-

priety. In the very anxiety she had evinced for his departure, she certainly admitted that she was conscious of some influence which he had over her feelings ; and, however right and proper the decision at which she arrived might have been, the very fact of its having been called for marked a very strong distinction between her feelings towards Charles and those which she entertained towards the other numerous visitors at the Hall, amongst whom, including Harvey, she should have made no distinction whatever.

It turned out that the inn at which they were next to change was one of the most comfortable in England. I have my reasons for not naming it, for that might lead to discoveries which I am not over-desirous to have made ; but it was an inn on the scale of accommodation of the Fountains at Canterbury ; the Rose, at Sittingbourn ; the Castle, at Marlborough ; or the Plough at Cheltenham. Every comfort was in actual readiness, as if the travellers had been waited and watched for ; and Emma found herself, at six o'clock in the afternoon, installed with her suffering friend in a home, made so at the shortest notice, endeavouring, by every exertion in her power, to support her companion — never, however, I must admit, losing sight of the hope of soothing her into a more communicative state of mind than that in which she actually appeared to be.

Precisely at the same moment, Lord Weybridge in London, cloyed already with the honey of flattery with which he had been most plenteously besmeared from every imaginable quarter, was writing and despatching a letter to his lady-mother, announcing his intention of visiting Binford on the following Thursday — making her the offer of accompanying him on his visit to Worcestershire, and desiring, in the most cordial manner, to be remembered to all her friends at Binford, whose kindness he should never forget, &c. &c. &c.

By the same post he wrote to Charles Harvey, to communicate what he had written to his mother, upon the subject of his visit, and announcing to him his intention of being at Ullsford on Wednesday evening, if by so doing he could have the pleasure of his company at dinner there,

in order that they might enjoy a little sympathetic conversation, and that Weybridge might judge how far his friend's reason, morality, and philosophy had overcome his misdirected affection for Mrs. Harbottle.

These he sealed and despatched, and then proceeded to make preparations for dinner, at which he expected a friend — a friend of his own, who was his friend when he neither *was* Lord Weybridge nor expected to be Lord Weybridge — a naval surgeon, who had been his messmate in the ward-room of the flag-ship in India — one Dr. Mac-Gopus, for whom he had the warmest esteem and affection, and with whom he constantly quarrelled whenever they met, and as regularly became friends when they met again. He had a high opinion of the Doctor's judgment; a great respect for his honour and principle. Upon him he devolved very much of his confidence, and from him derived very much counsel upon his accession to the title, at which period the Doctor, retired from the service, was laid up in ordinary somewhere in the neighbourhood of the New Road.

The Doctor had his peculiarities. They generally amused George, and sometimes provoked him. In the first place, the Doctor uniformly differed in opinion with every body round him. Shape the question how you might, he always contrived to take a different view of it from every body else. He always met every assertion with a plump negative; and, lastly, which to a fluent fellow like George, who loved to tell a story, and tell it in his own way, was most provoking, he had a mode of stopping a narrative — however interesting it might be in its nature, however important in its character — by “*querying*” the smallest possible details connected with it. However, as he is coming to dinner, his little peculiarities will shew *themselves*; for the fact of George's elevation to the peerage had not produced the slightest effect upon the Doctor's conduct and conversation.

As an officer, he was skilful to admiration, and brave to heroism — as a companion, he must speak for himself.

“ Well, now,” said the Doctor, “ tell me, are you much

happier, with all these fine things and fine people about you, than you were in the old craft in India?"

"Yes," said Lord Weybridge, "I am. My increased fortune will increase my means of doing good; and, above all, Doctor, it will enable me to marry according to my inclination."

"Oh," said MacGopus, "you are going to marry! What will our lady-mother say to that?"

"Give her consent," replied George. "Not that it is absolutely necessary."

"Who is the girl?"

"The only child of Mr. Lovell, the Rector of Binford."

"Oh, a Parson's Daughter!" said MacGopus, cramming a huge load of snuff up his nostrils: "that wo'n't do."

"It will do," said Lord Weybridge.

"It wo'n't," said MacGopus. "If you marry beneath yourself, you'll break your mother's heart."

"If I don't marry Emma Lovell, it will break my own."

"Stuff!" said MacGopus; "hearts never break; how should they? Nonsense! No, no—don't think of the Dominie's daughter."

"When I cease to think of her, may——"

"Psha!" interrupted the Doctor; "make no professions—take no oaths—the wind *will* change, whether you like it or not. You'll forget her now you are a lord."

"There you mistake me."

"Not I. I know human nature. What's good for a half-pay commander wo'n't do for a peer of the realm."

"Well, I start for Binford on Friday."

"What's Binford?" said MacGopus.

"I told you just now," said Lord Weybridge; "the place of which Emma's father is rector—and where my mother has established herself. I consider that journey as the deciding one of my life."

"Pah!" said the Doctor, taking more snuff.

"I shall start Friday morning."

"Stop a minute:—why Friday?—Never start on Fridays. Ships never do, if one can help it. If they do, they are lost. Well—go on."

"Saturday, then, if you like. I shall order the britcska to the door at ——"

"What is a britcska?"

"The name of the carriage, and ——"

"Unde derivatur?"

"Oh! — don't worry me about such infernal nonsense. Listen. I shall start about seven—and so get to Oxford about half-past twelve."

"Quere, now—why do you go through Oxford?"

"Why—why—because 't is the nearest road, and ——"

"Stop a minute — University College is the oldest college at Oxford, isn't it?"

"I don't know—I don't care. Will you hear me?—From Oxford I get to Chapel-house, through Woodstock ——"

"Ay, I know Woodstock," said MacGopus. "Let's see — Blenheim was built in ——"

"The deuce take Blenheim. Let me tell you my plan."

"Ah—well give us some wine, my lord."

"I don't mean, however, to get to Binford till the next day."

"Quere, now—what's Binford?" said the Doctor.

"Why, I have told you fifty times every day—the place where our cottage is—and ——"

"Oh—I know. What did you say the parson's name was?"

"Lovell."

"Ah—well, go on."

"Because," continued Lord Weybridge, with an ardour ill adapted for the reception of the perpetual checks interposed by his inquisitive and methodical companion, "I shall, I dare say, meet at Ullsford with——"

"Ullsford! quere ——"

"No.—Hang your queries.—Ullsford is the stage but one before Binford."

"And Binford, you said——"

"Pooh!—yes—fifty times. I say, at Ullsford I shall meet an excellent fellow—a friend of mine—Charles Harvey——"

"Harvey!" said MacGopus. "Ah—fish sauce—

meditations — circulation of the blood — who is Harvey, my lord?"

"A particular friend of mine, for whom I have the highest regard."

"Have you known him long?"

"Ever since we went to Binford."

"Ah? — Binford! — Binford is the place where your mother's cottage is — is not it?"

"Why — yes, to be sure it is."

"Where the parson lives?"

"Yes."

"What d'ye call his daughter?"

"Emma."

"Emma! — you'll never marry *her*."

"But I will, Doctor."

"You never will. There'll be Old Nick to pay, if you try it."

"So you said just now — but I am resolved."

"Ah — you think so."

"Think so! — Why you'll drive me mad. If I think so, I mean so — and thinking so —"

"You never will."

"Mercy on me! — How provoking you are! Harbottle himself is not half so tormenting."

"Quere, now — who's Harbottle?"

"I told you yesterday — the Squire at Binford."

"Binford! — Oh, ah."

"Now, do contrive to recollect; or, if you don't recollect, don't try to learn the name of any thing."

"How should I know about your Harbottles?"

"Of course not; but you can, at least, remember names."

"It seems, I cannot. Well!"

"Well! Nothing is well. You never attend to what a man says to you."

"Then why do you talk to me?" said MacGopus, giving his lordship an arch look, expressive of his own consciousness, that the peer prized him highly, even while abusing him for his love of minutiae. "I was always the same; it is not because you are changed that I can alter,—

I am off. When you — I mean when your lordship — wants me again, send. You know where I live. If you don't send I shan't come. I'm not company for a man in love ; but Emma you shall never marry ; at least, with my consent."

"Your consent!" exclaimed Lord Weybridge ; "who, in the name of all absurdity, ever thought of asking *your* consent?"

"Why, you," said MacGopus ; "when you were a youngster you never did any thing without my consent, and many a mast-heading I have saved you, my fine fellow ; rely upon it you had better stick to my advice now. I have no interest in what I say — I want nothing of you ; and although I might have called to wish you joy of your elevation, if it is a thing to congratulate you upon, I never should have sought you, if you had not sought me."

"All this I admit," said George ; "I admit a thousand obligations to you — but you *are* deucedly provoking, and that's the truth of it — as for my elevation, of which you speak, the accidental circumstance —"

"What do you call an accidental circumstance?" said MacGopus, — "a lubberly trick of a landsman's sailing-boat — a yacht, of ninety tons, that could not find sea-room in the Mediterranean. '*Ay de mi!*' as the Spaniards say, what odd notions some people have of pleasure!"

"Think of Crabshaw's escape!"

"Ah!" said MacGopus, "who's Crabshaw?"

"Why, I told you, the tutor."

"Ah! I recollect," said MacGopus. "Now what does a tutor of that sort get by way of salary?"

"How should I know!"

"Ask your friend the parson — at — what's the name of the place — at —"

"Oh, the devil!" said George, "you are enough to drive a man mad."

"I will not endanger your lordship's intellects," said the Doctor ; "good night. You are going out of town. When you return, you know where to hear of me ; but, take my advice, get rid of this Miss — whatever her name is, as fast as you can."

"Never, never, never!" said Lord Weybridge.

"That's a long time to wait," said MacGopus. "Farewell; good-night."

Saying which, the lofty monitor retired, much after the fashion of John Kemble (whom he greatly resembled in countenance and features) making an exit; leaving Lord Weybridge in a state of fever, brought on by impatience of his friend's anxiety for particulars, and an apprehension that he had offended him by his exhibition of it.

It was now Wednesday evening, and Lord Weybridge had begun to count the hours until he should start for the Rectory, little dreaming or suspecting what had occurred in the village so entirely to disorganise his plans and arrangements. We will leave him, until the arrival of the post the next morning puts him in possession of several facts; some of which are already known to the readers, and of certain others, which are not.

CHAPTER VI.

How strangely am I tempted
With opportunity, which like a sudden gust
Has swelled my calmer thoughts into a tempest:
— Accursed opportunity!

DENHAM.

LOVELL had taken, or rather sanctioned, a most important step in his daughter's career through life; so important, as Emma herself considered it, that she could by no means account for his conduct. But Lovell had yet a duty to perform connected with that step which, be it never forgotten, had for its object, under his auspices, to "put asunder those whom God had put together;" and which, if not more important, was infinitely more difficult.

He was aware, that when Fanny had — the moment that the Squire quitted the Hall, early in the morning, with the professed object of returning to Colonel Brad-

field's for another day's shooting — quitted it also eternally, she had left a note addressed to her husband, containing the following few but important words : —

“I have quitted Binford *for ever*. To Mr. Lovell I refer you for all further information about me.

“F. H.”

This was all — the measure was decisive — its announcement brief. Mr. Lovell felt the extent of responsibility which was left upon his shoulders. If he had differed in the *view* which Mrs. Harbottle took of the state of circumstances, his task would have been less difficult, for *she* was resolved to go, at all hazards and all perils. The moment, however, that he marked his approbation of her decision by sending his daughter as her companion, he incurred the entire responsibility of an adviser ; and, invalid as he was, and unaccustomed to controversial discussions, he felt an internal confidence, and even a constitutional strength, which he was sure would enable him to vindicate the line he had taken.

Harbottle, however, was not destined to wait until his return in the evening for the receipt of his wife's note. Hollis, the faithful and active, convinced by his mistress's early departure, her hurried manner, her neglect of Devon's services, and other trifling incidents, which, to persons of watchful and suspicious minds, are “*confirmations strong as proof of holy writ*,” that something more than ordinary was about to happen, sent off the note she had left by a special messenger to the Colonel's, with orders to find his master wherever he might be shooting.

The messenger proceeded as directed ; but, when he arrived at Colonel's Bradfield's, a spectacle far different from one of joy or felicity presented itself.

It appeared that, late in the day preceding, and just as the party at Colonel Bradfield's were shooting their way home, they fell in with Charles Harvey, who, the reader will recollect, was staying at Mordaunt's, within four miles of Bradfield's house. His appearance was quite a surprise, and an agreeable one, to all of the party except Harbottle ;

however, Bradfield and all his party insisted upon it that he should dine with them ; Mordaunt they knew was gone to town on business ; and as they were only men, Charles need not care about dress — and Harbottle did not dress — and none of them would dress — and he could just as well ride home after dinner as before. Harvey assented. Harvey and Harbottle met : Harvey felt awkward — why, he could scarcely tell — so did Harbottle ; but the awkwardness displayed itself rather to their own consciences than to the observation of the company, and the day passed off admirably.

When they broke up, Harbottle rode home, and, as we know, arrived in safety. So rode Harvey ; but, to the infinite horror of the assembled party at Bradfield's, at breakfast the next morning, news was brought that his body had been found, with that of the horse on which he rode, dead (the latter dashed almost to pieces), at the bottom of a gravel pit, in the middle of Broustead Common ; a pit which had been recently opened and dug, and of which, consequently, even he who knew the country well was not aware.

The lamentations which this melancholy intelligence created were general ; and it is scarcely necessary to add, that, however keen the different members of the party were for the sport of shooting, an accident so dreadful in its results put a stop to their proceedings. The body of the unfortunate gentleman had been removed to the Half-moon, a public house on the road to Broustead, and a coroner's jury was summoned to hold an inquest on it the following morning.

To moralise upon the uncertainty of life, or enlarge upon the precariousness of existence, would be neither new, nor in this place edifying ; but the effect produced upon the company, of which, in high health and spirits, this agreeable and accomplished young man had, not twelve hours before, made one, by the intelligence, may easily be imagined ; even Harbottle, who, with feelings of jealousy rankling in his breast, had learned to hate his society and fear his influence while alive, appeared overcome by the event ; and tears, ay ! tears were seen to roll down his

iron cheeks as they related to him the circumstances of finding the body. Such symptoms were not looked for in such a being as the Squire. Those who knew nothing of the real state of his acquaintance with Harvey, wondered to see such marks of tenderness ; but if they could have known how angrily they had parted, a cause for their appearance might have been found in a feeling of remorse and regret.

The party at Colonel Bradfield's separated : their diversions were for the present suspended, and each man betook himself to his home. Amongst the number, Harbottle prepared to go his way, when, just as he was taking leave of the Colonel, the brief note which the active and vigilant Hollis had despatched to his master, and of which we already know the contents, were put into his hand.

Dreadful was the state to which the perusal of this announcement reduced, or rather elevated, Harbottle. Anger — surprise — remorse — terror, all were at once operating upon his mind. What had he said or done — what had been the immediate cause of her flight? — not love — not guilt. No — no — the object of her guilty love — as he had deemed it — was dead. Was it in an agony of sorrow for his loss that she had fled? — no — *that* could not be, for she could not have known of it — yet she might. It was scarcely possible — whither was she gone? — she had no relation but an aunt, of whom she knew nothing. What was he to do? he should become the by-word, the mark for scorn to point his finger at — and all that he had dreaded far beyond the loss of her of whom he was so vain — the ridicule of the world — would fall upon him — ridicule — contempt perhaps. But he would undeceive the world, he would exhibit his wife's conduct in its proper point of view — would he? — what had she done — how had she misconducted herself? Could Hollis substantiate a crime against her? — could he safely attribute to the ill-fated Harvey, now stretched upon the pallet-bed of the “worst inn's worst room,” guilt or intrigue? — Hollis *would* say any thing — and, with his views of religion and morality, would not scruple, perhaps, to substantiate his evidence by an oath — but what *could* he say?

Lovell was to give him all the intelligence he was to receive about his wife — how was this? — if she had been guilty, she would not have made *him* her confidant — how far had she trusted him? — had she betrayed the last night's conversation? — had she proclaimed him — what? — that he dare not ask himself. His quivering lips, his trembling knees, and his parched throat, were all of them proofs how much he dreaded, as well as regretted, Fanny's flight.

He had not courage to see any of the party — all of whom, as has just been mentioned, were on the point of flying from the centre of affliction — but mounted his horse, and cantered homewards, nearly unconscious of what he was doing.

"Send Hollis to me," were his first words on his arrival at Binford.

He passed across the hall and through the drawing-room: there lay her work — on a table were her gloves — her writing-desk — the pen with which she had written her last, last letter; there were the flowers her hand had placed, the evening before, in one of the vases on the chimney-piece — they were still fresh and fragrant, but she that had placed them there was gone; the book from which she had been reading to him lay open at the very page where she had ceased, and a copy, which at his desire she was making of a drawing of his favourite dog, lay by his side. Base and barbarous as he might have been, the pang he then felt was almost punishment sufficient to atone for all his cruelty to her.

Where was she? — she that he *had* loved — adored — with all the love and adoration of which he was capable — the pride of his heart, the ornament of his house — gone — gone! and, as she had said, for ever. On his knees would he now have supplicated for hours to see her again in her wonted place — again smiling — again attending to his wants, and even anticipating his wishes. What was to be done?

"I thought it best to send the note to you," said Hollis: "I was sure my mistress never meant to return."

"Is Devon with her?"

"No, sir," said Hollis, "no human being from this

accompanies her, nor did she take with her one single article of dress. She left the house before I was up. Devon did not see her before her departure. I heard afterwards that she had been at the Parsonage, and I thought it might be only some early expedition with Miss Lovell; but when I saw the letter I thought differently."

"Have you enquired how she went from Binford?"

"In Mr. Lovell's carriage; that I found out at the George. It has not been away more than an hour. I understand they were going towards Bath."

"What do you mean by *they*?"

"Miss Lovell is gone with my mistress," said Hollis.

"Miss Lovell gone with her!"

"Yes—so that any notion of her meeting Mr. Harvey is out of the question."

"Harvey!" exclaimed Harbottle, "Harvey—meet him! What! haven't you heard—Harvey is dead—a corpse—stiff—cold! Harvey—no! no!"

"Dead!" said Hollis. "What, murdered?"

"No, no!" said Harbottle; "who should murder him?—an accident. His horse, it is supposed, ran away with him on returning from Colonel Bradfield's last night, and pitched head foremost with his master on him, into a gravel-pit, which has been incautiously left open on Breustead Common."

"Was he at Colonel Bradfield's last night?" said Hollis.

"He was."

"And found dead this morning?"

"Yes," said Harbottle; "would he had been dead a year ago!"

"Ay, so indeed; and it had been well, and I believe our mistress would have been here to-day," said Hollis; "but the accident is strange."

"Not strange at all. He had drank much wine, the horse he rode was that bay which he had here—always a runaway,—and I suppose, in his harum-skarum way of riding across a country, he pitched into the pit before he was aware of his danger."

"There'll be an inquest on the body, of course?" said Hollis.

" Of course, to-day. What evidence can be adduced, I cannot see ; for who is to be a witness to an accident which happened on a dark night, to a man alone on a heath, it would be difficult to guess."

" That's true," said Hollis; " but who saw him last ? "

" That's more than I know," said Harbottle: " it's a bad thing, and a shocking thing, and at any other time I should have felt it more than now ; when, besides all other circumstances connected with his name and conduct, I have a sorrow of my own, much deeper than any which the sorrows of others can afflict."

" My advice, sir," said Hollis, " to you, in the business, as regards my mistress, is not to disturb yourself about it. Now she is gone, I declare, to my mind, I don't believe she ever cared about you — never valued you as she ought to have done. If I were you I would make her a suitable allowance, and live on, as comfortable and as happy as a prince without her."

" Unfeeling scoundrel!" said Harbottle: " how dare you presume to utter advice to *me*, a master for whose respectability you have pretended to have a care ! "

" I spoke but what I thought," said Hollis : " the moment a woman — a lady, I mean, I beg pardon — but, ladies or not ladies, they are all much the same — shows that she cares nothing about her husband, why, then, what I say is, her husband ——"

" Care nothing ! Hold your tongue, this instant," said Harbottle : " leave me — get out of my sight : it is to *you*, rather than to your mistress, I owe all this misery, this heap, this accumulation of wretchedness that I feel, and from which all my money, ten times told, can't release me. You, sir, it was, who first excited my suspicions about the unfortunate, poor, lost Harvey ! "

" Poor ! " muttered Hollis : " oh, he pities *him*, and *I* am a scoundrel ! "

If Mr. Hollis had not known the violence of his master's temper, and moreover been quite clear as to the side on which his " bread was buttered," he would have made that master such an answer as would have astounded him ; but he was a patient creature, he knew into what this fever of tem-

per would subside, and was quite certain that in the next twelve hours he should have the Squire as much under command as ever. Only let the master or mistress condescend to make the servant a *friend*, the tables are turned in the twinkling of an eye, and the menial ceases to be the inferior. In Hollis's hands, the purse-proud Squire had placed himself; to him had he humiliated himself even into the requesting rather than ordering (for it forms no specific part of the servant's duty), to pry, and listen, and pick up intelligence connected with the domestic proceedings of his own establishment; and now, because the results of his inquisitorial system had been most calamitous, he found himself at the mercy of the fellow with whose insolence and revengeful malignity he had the misery of being threatened.

Harbottle — and that astonished his familiar — although evidently shocked and startled by the flight of his wife, was less agitated by that event, which, Hollis thought, would have excited him most violently, than by the death of Harvey, which the same discerning individual seemed to think ought to have had no terrors for him. The Squire, however, resolved upon proceeding to the Rectory instantly, and making such enquiries as he considered necessary as to Fanny's arrangements, and as to the reasons she had given Lovell for her sudden adoption of the measure which she had taken. It is quite possible that he was not himself conscious of all that had passed the preceding evening, and certain it is that he was not prepared for what he was to hear from the lips of his reverend friend, for whom he had really a great respect, and for whose pious and exemplary character he perhaps never felt a higher regard than at a moment when he felt himself lowered to a pitch of misery and degradation, hitherto beyond his imagination, and at present far beyond his expression.

He walked to the Parsonage — cursed as he passed his own threshold by the servant who, under his own auspices, had destroyed, him — sneered at by his groom-boys, and most especially ridiculed by his housemaids, who peeped from the bed-room windows as he passed along to join in the mockery that was going on below. Of his liability to this sort of observation he was fully conscious, and to its

unpleasantness most sensitively alive ; and his heart beat, and his cheek blanched, as he approached the shops of Binford, at the doors of which the red-faced bumpkins who owned them were standing, with the bare apprehension that they might be rude, or cold in their civility, or insolent in their bearing ; but little did Harbottle know, however much he gloried in it, of the influence which wealth possesses in a community like that composed of ten-pound householders. The " fat and greasy," and the " great unwashed," bowed and smiled their best, as usual, and as they would have done, if, like Bluebeard, he had cropped his ladies by dozens, and had not been detected. But the bright-eyed wives and daughters of the gentleman " seap and tallow line," hidden behind their muslin curtains and Venetian blinds, looked on, and, in " their looking, looked unutterable things;" for, be it understood, excellent and exemplary as Fanny was, the female portion of the Binford population had been for the last two years wondering how Mrs. Harbottle could endure such a man, more especially as Mrs. Devon, who was a perfect oracle among the second-rate inhabitants, and who, at that period, considered her mistress quite (as she called her in writing of her) an " angle," related such a collection of *historiettes* connected with the disagreements between her lady and her master, as led them to suppose that a very slight strain upon the cord would snap it asunder.

Harbottle never before, in walking through Binford, felt what he did on that memorable day ; nor was the wretchedness of his present feelings at all relieved by the anticipation of the conversation which must ensue between him and the Rector. He turned the different points of the case over in his mind, and resolved, at all events, to rate his reverend friend for permitting his daughter to accompany Fanny, thus lending a marked and important sanction to a step which, at that moment, he was prepared to contend, nothing that he had either said or done could possibly justify.

In this state of turmoil and agitation he reached the gate of the Parsonage-house. He rang the bell, and was admitted ; but such is the peculiar sensitiveness of human nature at certain periods, that he felt a conviction that the Rector's man, who happened to open the door, did not re-

ceive him with the same respect which he was formerly wont to use ; and when Miss Lovell — the aunt, who had returned the preceding evening to give Emma her holiday — rose as soon as he came into the drawing-room, and said, more coldly, as it seemed to him than usual, that she would herself go and tell her brother he was there, it struck him that there was an alteration in her manner which nothing but a family determination, decidedly against himself, could have induced.

She did not re-appear ; nor did even the Rector's man show himself again ; a small white-faced boy, who was called “page” to aunt Eleanor, the sister, and who in that character, superseding what commonly-minded persons were accustomed to consider footboys, wore red seams down his pantaloons, and two hundred and forty-eight white sugar-loaf buttons on his jacket, came into the room, told the Squire that the Rector would be glad to see him, and “marshalled him the way that he should go.”

The Squire entered the library in which his unhappy wife had detailed her sorrows but a few hours before ; and Mr. Lovell, having received him calmly, yet coldly, desired that he might not be disturbed while Mr. Harbottle was with him ; the pale-faced urchin with the buttons bowed obedience, and the double doors of the sanctum were closed upon the anxious pair.

CHAPTER VII.

The parent's partial fondness for a child,
An only child, can surely be no crime.

SHIRLEY.

THE longest day must have an end. The morning so much wished for, because it was the one immediately preceding that on which Lord Weybridge was to start for Binford, dawned — his lordship rose — dressed, and proceeded to breakfast, when, amongst various letters from different parts

of England, one from his mother, larger in its size and important in its weight, first caught his notice — he broke the seal and read : —

“ Dale Cottage, Monday.

“ My dear George,

“ News, and of much importance, from a village like this, may be unexpected — if I suspect rightly, it may be unwelcome. So many events have been crowded into the day, that the whole place is literally ringing with them, and so very curious are they in their nature, that I scarcely know where to begin.

“ In the first place, prepare your mind for a shock — a serious shock — your friend Mr. Harvey is dead ! — killed last night as he was returning to Mr. Mordaunt's from Colonel Bradfield's: he and his horse were both found, early this morning, in a gravel pit which has been recently opened on Broustead Common. This intelligence, I am sure, will agitate and affect you, as indeed it agitated and affected me, not only because I admired Mr. Harvey for his accomplishments and qualities, but because I know he was an intimate and favourite friend of yours: such, however, is the fact. The coroner's inquest is to be held to-day; but as he was galloping home alone, of course there can be no evidence to show how the accident occurred, and therefore nothing explanatory of the distressing circumstances can be expected.

“ This melancholy occurrence is to be coupled with another event wholly unconnected with it, but which affords an example of those curious coincidences which you and I have so often discussed, as forming a striking part of the romance of real life. Mrs. Harbottle has eloped from the Squire — she went off to-day, about twelve o'clock, nobody knows why — nobody knows whither. She has not taken her own maid with her nor any servant of the house. But there is another circumstance connected with her flight which, perhaps, will interest some people more than the flight itself, — she is accompanied in her notable expedition from her home by your innocent, shy, unassuming, unpretending fair friend, Miss Emma Lovell, who, in the broad face of day, has had the assurance to play companion to a lady running away from her lawful husband.

" These incidents, as I have just said, in one day, are tolerably well for a quiet place like this. The Squire was sent for home, after her departure, and returned to the Hall. What steps he intends to take nobody here knows ; but at present he has exhibited no inclination to follow the fugitive. I have seen nothing of him ; but Mrs. Harbottle's maid has told mine that he has been raving and storming like a madman all the forenoon, more particularly since his return from the Parsonage-house, whither he, in the first instance, proceeded to enquire about his lady.

" I made particular enquiries whether Mrs. Harbottle knew of the fatal occurrence to poor Mr. Harvey before her flight, and I find that she could have known nothing about it—nobody had been to Binford from Colonel Bradfield's till long after her departure, and the Squire himself only heard of it at the moment he arrived to join the day's shooting.

" If, as is generally whispered here, the lady had made an appointment to meet and go off, or rather go on, with Mr. Harvey, the sudden intelligence of his death must have been an awfully serious blow to her. But what puzzles every body is the connivance of the grave, pious, and venerable Parson in the expedition of his daughter in the lady's company. Some people deduce from this event an idea that Mrs. Harbottle has suffered some grievous injury or ill treatment from her husband, and that Mr. Lovell has lent her his daughter's character and reputation to support her in the struggle. This I, for one, do not believe, nor am I at all sure that the poor old man, even at this moment, knows any thing about his girl's going. At all events, Mrs. Harbottle has one satisfaction with which to console herself ; in falling, she has pulled down her friend, for I hear that Popjoy's assistant, whom you recollect I recommended as an excellent husband to the interesting young lady, has already declared off ; so that you see the Parson's Daughter is nearly as much damaged as her imprudent and most probably guilty companion.

" To-morrow, or the next day at farthest, I conclude you will be here ; and then, perhaps, you may sift out

some farther particulars : the sensation created in this monotonous circle is quite extraordinary.

" I have had a very long letter from the Gorgons—they quite rave about you ; but I have written to dear Lady Gorgon that sort of letter in reply which she will perfectly understand as a hope-killer for any of *her* girls. The Duchess, too, tells me that you have promised to go to them very soon, and——"

" The Duchess may ——" — what, it is impossible to surmise—but so exclaimed George when he came to her Grace's name—throwing down his mother's letter, and hiding his eyes with his hands—" Emma—gone—lost to *me*—and herself—it cannot be ! Why that croaking doctor must deal with some familiar, to have threatened me so earnestly with losing her—Emma—the pure—the good—the beautiful—accompany a wife flying from the arms and home of her husband?—It cannot be—I say again, and again, it cannot be. I'll never go near Binford—I'll never see that hated place again.—What could I say to Harbottle?—what to Lovell?—I dare not ask them any thing concerning what has happened—and you, too, my poor, kind friend, Harvey—you to whom I addressed the expression of all my feelings only yesterday—anticipating that you would bound to meet me at Ullsford to talk over our sorrows and hopes together—gone—dead! is it all a dream?—Harvey dead—the honest hand that pressed mine a few short days ago—cold—stiff—senseless—surely this must be some trick to cozen me—some frightful story wrought up by my mother in a fit of frenzy, to drive me for ever from the place so intimately associated with all the people she has named—now dead—or, perhaps, worse!"

Lord Weybridge's first impression was to seek his old friend, the Doctor ; but he felt himself at the moment unequal to his society, not only because the numerous incidents which had occurred would naturally give rise to innumerable interrogations, which he was quite sure he should have neither patience nor temper to answer, but because he felt convinced that the Doctor would consider

himself amazingly strengthened in his *dictum* about not marrying the Parson's Daughter, by the recent extraordinary occurrences, and would consequently deal out his decisions upon that point so triumphantly as to drive him half mad.

To what line of conduct Lord Weybridge might have eventually committed himself, it is impossible to say, for distracted as he was with his view of Emma's extraordinary conduct, in countenancing and supporting Mrs. Harbottle, and grieved to the heart as he was by the dreadful accident which had occurred to his amiable friend, he was compelled, by circumstances over which he had no control, to attend—as much as in him lay—to law business of a nature so dry and dull, that even the gratifying fact of his own exaltation and aggrandisement could scarcely repay him for his application to the subject. It, nevertheless, forced him to make that application, and consequently draw, or rather drive, his attention from the circumstances much more interesting to his heart and mind, if not so vitally important to his property and pretensions.

That he would have hastened his departure for Binford, or made up his mind never to see it again, appeared equally probable when he had read the dreadful accounts contained in his lady-mother's letter. But whatever might have been his resolution, it was stayed and checked by another event, equally unexpected with either of the others which have just been detailed, and which was neither more nor less than the arrival, about the middle of the next day, at the door of his lordship's hotel, of Lady Frances Sheringham herself and her maid, in a “yellow and two,” with her tall footman, Robert, bumping his plush upon the bar of the “chay,” outside.

Her ladyship had, previously to that morning, felt various suspicions about the interest which her son took in Binford, its politics and its inhabitants; but whether the real object of attraction were the Squire's lady or the Parson's Daughter, she had not, even up to that period, satisfactorily to herself ascertained. She had now convinced herself. If the reader recollects the preceding narrative,

he will see how the discovery arose :—her ladyship had received, by that morning's post, a letter from her son, directed to the Lady Frances Sheringham, Dale Cottage, Binford, which she had no sooner opened than she found it was not intended for her, but on the contrary for his friend Charles Harvey, at that time no more. George had, it will be remembered, written a letter to his mother, and another to his ill-fated friend, and sealed, addressed, and despatched them both at the same time. In the confusion of the moment he had mis-directed, and consequently mis-despatched, his epistles—the result of which confusion, not so uncommon in society as steady-going methodical people may suppose, was the perusal by Lady Frances of the following confidential and explanatory epistle :—

“ Tuesday evening.

“ Dear Harvey,

“ I verily believe that nothing upon earth is so delightful as meeting with a little sympathy. I do assure you our dinner and evening at Ullsford were to me most agreeable, so agreeable, indeed, that I am going to propose our meeting there again on Friday. On that day I shall be *en route* to Binford, whence I shall take my mother to Severn Stoke, which she has never seen, and which now is mine. I shall, therefore, if it suit your engagements, call a halt at Ullsford, and repeat our last fishing and fowling repast on Thursday. The Mordaunts can surely spare you for one dinner ; and as your heart is not yet, I presume, quite at your own disposal, the thread-paper misses of the house cannot have sufficient attraction to keep you tethered to their apron-strings—they are indeed *mordantes* ; but I think you are not likely to be a sufferer—so let me hear that you will meet me.

“ I hate any thing that sounds romantic, and am almost as great an enemy to what ladies of a certain age call sentiment, as the veriest dandy in London. But, my dear Charles, I honestly confess to you that Emma and her beauties—not only personal and mental, but of disposition and heart—are not to be got rid of—she is so natural, so mild, so amiable, so gentle, and so good, and rely upon it,

my dear friend, however lax a man of the world may be in his morality, and however loosely he may appear to hold the ‘bonds of reason,’ as some poet says, there is no being—at least I hope, and even believe—so callous or depraved, as not to be affected seriously and most advantageously by the sight of virtue and innocence like hers, brought into play in their natural sphere of action, without forcing, without pretension, without affectation. The sinner’s tear is a pearl of precious value; and I am not ashamed to admit to *you*—although I might not venture to do it at my Lady Tom-Tit’s *soirée*—that I have felt one ready to start, when I have contemplated the excellence of that exemplary girl, and thought to myself how blest, how infinitely blest he would be, who could attach to himself, and to his heart and soul, such tenderness, such kindness, such affection, and such piety!

“ It is a dangerous theme. If I were to write all I think and feel about this dear good girl, I verily believe I should outwrite my most voluminous mother. My doom is sealed:—either Emma Lovell is Lady Weybridge, or Lady Weybridge never exists during my lifetime.

“ My good and fond parent, who is, I assure you, a most admirable woman—spoiled, perhaps, a little by flattery at her first outset in the world—will scarcely bear to hear this determination;—and yet, how odd! She married my father against the wishes of all her relations, who, as I have heard, were most anxious that she should set her cap at a duke of sixty-four; and yet she took her own way; and, as far as worldly affairs go, her decision has turned out well—for here I am, what I am. But I am sure I should never get her to listen to my proposition about dear Emma. That *she* has *gentle* blood in her veins, who that has seen her can doubt? That she has more than gentle blood in them, I am prepared to contend with my sensitive mother. Her mother was literally noble; and although you know enough of me, to know that I care nothing for the small differences of name in the same essential fluid, it may perhaps make a great difference in my discussions with Lady Frances, who is a stickler for such things, and, the other day, seriously justified some

man who paid seven hundred pounds to the heralds, for making out a pedigree, in which the principal charge was, for kings, at five shillings apiece:—a proper price for crowned heads, I know you *would* say, if you were in spirits. It was an Irish gentleman of whom she was speaking, as you may naturally suppose; for kings were never quite so plentiful in England; and, I suspect, if the Reform Bill passes, the scarcity, for the future, will be even still more striking.

“I must not go on filling up this sheet with my rhapsodies. When we meet, my dear fellow, we may talk of her—of *her*—ay; and if you promise me, as your senior—we sailors look sharply to seniority—to behave well, give your own passions the curb, and allow mine the snaffle—we will talk of another *she*—and a lovely one, too. But remember, Charles,—yet why should I lecture—you have taken your step—love is not to be trifled with if you keep the field—retreat in good time, as you have most judiciously done, and you will not, perhaps, be pursued.

“Oh, Harvey! this horrid London—bad in its best season—but now beyond endurance. I cannot tell you how I look forward to Thursday—fresh air and fresh manners—and that unsophistication which is so much ridiculed here—but which holds out an assurance of perfect happiness—are to me essential—indispensable. I must have them, Harvey—and so, my dear fellow, write to me—write—but meet me you must at Ullsford on Thursday. *Entre nous*—the blue eyes shall not be mentioned. You know what I mean. All I say is, meet me. On the very brink of happiness myself, trust to me for being a most worthy sympathiser in the sorrows of others. Now, do not fail me, my dear Harvey, and believe me truly yours,

“GEORGE — Psha!—what am I writing!

“WEYBRIDGE.”

“So so!” said Lady Frances, as she laid down this mis-directed letter, “and have I, by an extraordinary accident, after all discovered the real inclinations of my son! Now it comes clear as daylight to my mind’s eye.

Now I can understand his coldness to all his relations at the present auspicious moment—his avoidance of all my friends, and his anxiety to return here. And he thinks his mother was spoiled by flattery, does he? And he believes that Miss Lovell has noble blood in her veins!—indeed!—fifteenth cousin of the great aunt of an Irish baron, perhaps. Miss Lovell to be Lady Weybridge!—to be *my* daughter-in-law!—No, no, son George, that may never be —”

And thus she went on soliloquising, until she had worked herself into the determination of the absolute necessity for immediate action. Something must be done on the instant. George must not return to Binford. He must not have the opportunity of hearing Emma's vindication from the lips of her venerable father, nor the justification of his permission for her to accompany Fanny. If, as she had really been told, Emma had generously and considerately volunteered, under her father's sanction, to make the journey to the residence of Mrs. Harbottle's aunt, her merit and kindness would be instantly made manifest, while the termination of their otherwise mysterious expedition at the house of the nearest female relation she had, would rescue Mrs. Harbottle from any imputation of blame. All these facts must unquestionably come to the knowledge of George, if he were suffered to make his promised visit to the Cottage, and therefore the blow must be struck instantly. Lord Weybridge must be stopped in London, and their journey to Worcestershire made without reference to Binford, and without any deviation from the straight road, in order to visit it.

On her way to London, Lady Frances took into her consideration the course she should pursue with regard to the letter, which had thus accidentally and unexpectedly come to her hands; and after a lengthened debate with herself, she resolved altogether to conceal the receipt of it from her son, judging, that, in the confusion which the death of his friend must have occasioned in the Mor-dauant family, either the letter which had of course been misdirected to him by Lord Weybridge would be entirely lost, or, if preserved, necessarily opened by some of his

connections, who, when it was found to have been so misdirected, would, in all human probability, forward it to her ladyship ; her ladyship, in her anxiety to appear to George perfectly disinterested, in her assaults upon the propriety and respectability of Miss Lovell, losing sight of the much more probable, as being the more obvious course to be pursued—that of returning the letter, unopened, to the peer from whom it came franked. Strange, however, as it may seem, her ladyship's silence was effectual ; for whether the letter were opened by servants or accidentally mislaid, certain it is, it never turned up, and Lord Weybridge never was in the slightest degree enlightened as to the source of his mother's authentic information with regard to his real views and intentions.

Lady Frances, however, had a curious mind. If she had an object to attain, she would always go about it as engineers approach a fortified place, by a zig-zag, or like a waterman, who looks one way while he pulls another. A story Squire Harbottle used to tell in his happy days might serve as an illustration of her ladyship's character. He had ordered one of his labourers to cut a path across a field for the accommodation of his neighbours by shortening a distance between two given points. The man obeyed his orders ; and when the Squire came to look at the path, he found it, instead of being straight, and in a direct line from boundary to boundary, sinuous and snake-like, upon which he abused the labourer for his stupidity. The labourer looked sceptically at his master, and said, “ Love your heart, sir, a path's never straight ; it's out o' the nature of a path to be straight.” So was it out of the nature of Lady Frances Sheringham's mind to be straight, and she felt herself in the present instance fully justified in exerting all her tact and trickery in carrying the present principal object of her life—that of overthrowing and utterly destroying the much-dreaded connection between her son and the Parson's Daughter.

“ My mother !” exclaimed Lord Weybridge, as his servant announced Lady Frances.

“ Yes, dearest George !” exclaimed her ladyship, run-

ning into his arms ; “ I could not endure the thought of the distress you must be suffering, on account of your poor friend’s death, in the midst of the worries of business and the dulness of London ; and I resolved to volunteer my society. If you had come to me at Binford; on your way to Worcestershire, it would have made nearly forty miles difference in the journey ; now that I am here, all that will be saved, and we can go to Worcestershire direct. Tell me, my dear child, how are you ? ”

“ In health, well enough,” said George ; “ but in mind diseased. The events with which your letter have made me acquainted, only prove that rank and fortune cannot alone secure happiness. So severe a blow has never fallen upon me as that which your intelligence inflicted.”

“ The news of the death of one to whom we are attached,” said Lady Frances, “ coming so suddenly, has all the terror of a frightful dream ; it seems impossible, and we vainly hope to awake from the terrible illusion. Is it not curious, that such an event should have occurred so near to the period of Mrs. Harbottle’s elopement ? ”

“ Curious, indeed,” said George ; “ but strangest of all is it, that she should have persuaded Emma Lovell to accompany her, or that her father should have sanctioned such a step, which he must have done. However, a few days will clear up that part of the story, for if we do not pass through Binford, going to Worcestershire, I shall, at all events, see the poor old gentleman when I leave you there, on our return.”

“ I don’t think I shall go back to Binford,” said Lady Frances, “ till after Christmas. My present intention is, to go on from you to the north, and so remain till I return from Grimsbury. Binford is so cut up and altered by the events which have so unexpectedly occurred, and, as circumstances now stand, one must take a decided line in the politics of the place—that I shall retire from it, until it has again settled down into its wonted tranquillity. I have made my arrangements ; the furniture is all to be taken down, and the cottage, as you would say, to be ‘ laid up in ordinary ’ till January, or, perhaps, February.”

" If I ever see Binford again," said George, " I shall see it before January."

" I was sure your feelings would be sadly excited about the dreadful accident to Mr. Harvey," said Lady Frances.

" And, tell me," said his lordship, " did any thing appear in the evidence before the coroner to account for the destruction of my poor friend ?"

" Nothing," said Lady Frances ; " nothing beyond the fact which I wrote to you ; the people have made a strong representation of the dangerous state and position of the gravel-pit ; but the precaution comes rather late. I never saw a more powerful feeling than the event has created in the neighbourhood."

" Poor fellow ! " said George.

And thus did Lord Weybridge continue enquiring, and Lady Frances replying, until at length it occurred to them both, that her ladyship might perhaps require some refreshment after her hurried journey, and they parted only to meet again at dinner.

Lady Frances could not help congratulating herself on the execution of her plan, and rejoicing greatly in the readiness with which George had altered the arrangement of taking Binford *en route* to his country house ; but she still saw the difficulty she had to encounter in preventing a correspondence between him and the Rector, which she considered, as things stood, almost certain to be entered upon. George, however, could not write to him that day, and before the close of the next, she hoped she might contrive to hit upon some expedient which should frustrate the intention altogether.

The party at dinner was originally to have consisted of Lord Weybridge, his privy-counsellor, MacGopus, and the tutor of his late cousin, Mr. Crabshaw, whom he had appointed one of his chaplains. This little junto was agreeably increased by the unexpected arrival of Lady Frances, who had never yet seen either of those gentlemen ; for George before his elevation had never any home, except his mother's house or hotel, and, therefore, had no opportunity of entertaining his own personal friends at, what would else no doubt have been, his hospitable board.

In anticipation of the arrival of the guests, and in an interesting conversation about themselves, we shall for the present leave the lord and the lady, and take a view of events as they appear to be in progress in the country.

CHAPTER VIII.

Your thoughts are still as much your own
As when you kept the key of your own breast.

DRYDEN.

It has long been a question—and by many very zealous persons—a question of vast importance, whether the Eleusinian and Dionysian mysteries, the fraternity of Ionian architects, and the Esselian and Pythagorean associations were the same as those of freemasonry at the present moment, varied only as the religious opinions and rites of the different fraternities themselves differ. Huge volumes have been written, and great names made in the discussion of these topics, which, to the “profane” and uninitiated, may appear not of such transcendent consequence; but we must leave them all, wherever they may be found, to the contemplation of our reader, and content ourselves with merely telling him that no lodge in the world was ever more closely tiled than Lovell's library during Harbottle's visit; nor any secret more unattainable than the history of what passed within its walls between the Squire and the Rector, pending their interview.

He entered the Parsonage red and raving with rage, he left it pale and subdued; he spoke, as he entered, in a tone of authority and passion, he quitted it with lowness and submission, and betook himself to the Hall, where he remained for a short time only, and then departed in his travelling carriage, as most people supposed, in pursuit of his lady.

This, however, was not the case. She was not destined to be so followed; and on the second day from their de-

parture, she and her friend reached the residence of her much-talked-of aunt, the elder sister of her late father, a venerable lady, rigid in her morality, wholly unused to the world as it goes, a stranger to London for forty years, and one of the most peculiar characters imaginable: she was full of the anecdotes of her day, and of the period when she had known a great deal of every body and every thing, and when her father, the grandfather of Mrs. Harbottle, was a man of wealth and importance.

Fanny, who, to Emma's great disappointment and even vexation, had never gone one step farther in the disclosure of her reasons for so abruptly quitting home, evidently began to feel nervous and agitated as she approached the house of the veteran Diana, to whose care she was about to commit herself, and whose protection was so requisite and important to her character in her present difficult and delicate position. It was in vain Emma periodically renewed her enquiries on the subject; she was met by her friend with one of those "pray don't ask me's," which are invincible, and the claims of friendship, which Emma, upon a principle of duty to her father, could not hesitate to admit.

Is it, however, to be supposed, that when the day approached on which George was to revisit Binford, and when, even by Fanny's own statements, and the repetition of the conversation she had with him, it was evident he intended to make a formal proposal for Emma's hand, she, with all her friendship, all her fortitude, all her philosophy, could keep her thoughts from wandering homeward? a tendency to which, it must be admitted, they the more inclined, from the unusual, and to her unaccountable, reserve of Mrs. Harbottle.

She had sacrificed every thing for her, even from the very first proposition she had made to the last, and yet she was not deemed worthy of her friend's confidence. "Incompatibility of temper" was to be the plea to her aunt for her separation, backed and corroborated by a letter from Lovell. But whatever old Miss Jarman might think of the matter, Emma knew, for *she* had been told so much, that "incompatibility of temper" was to be *called* the

cause of their disunion ; but that, in fact, it was not the *real* source of the evil. Surely, placed as she was, she ought to know the whole truth ; but no, her father had entreated her not to press Mrs. Harbottle on the subject, to which she had agreed ; convinced that she would, of herself, communicate all the circumstances connected with it : on the contrary, she found that she would communicate none ; and as Emma's suspicions, during the progress of their journey, turned more decidedly than ever towards something connected with Charles Harvey, and she ventured even to hint as much, Fanny's agitation and suffering were visibly increased, and, as she had before done, she earnestly entreated her never to let her hear his name mentioned.

But there was another thing which mortified poor Miss Lovell almost as much, if not quite, as the silence of her friend upon her own particular affairs, which was, that she never, or if ever, only cursorily alluded to *hers*. Once or twice she expressed a regret, rather civil and formal, though apparently sincere, that her misfortunes had been the cause of taking Emma away from Binford at the very point of time at which Lord Weybridge was expected ; but she did not dwell upon the circumstance, she did not talk about him, or his merits, or his attentions, or his affection ; on the contrary, she maintained a sort of sullen silence, which, particularly as far as his lordship was concerned, was extremely unpleasant to Emma, and, moreover, had a tendency to connect, in some way or other — how, she did not, it is true, distinctly make out — her removal from Binford with his lordship's arrival there.

About the dusk of the second day's journey — not expeditiously performed, for a carriage with a pair of horses on the outside and a couple of ladies within, is seldom put into any very rapid motion — they reached the top of the hill which commands a view of the town, in the neighbourhood of which Miss Jarman's residence was situated. The fading redness of the setting sun displayed to their eyes the castle and church-tower, and the most prominent buildings of the town, blended in one deep blue mass,

fantastically shaped, and animated by the lighter blue and curling smoke from the chimneys.

The post-boy, taking advantage of the moment to rest his tired steeds, touching his hat, turned on his horse to enquire whether he was to go across the mead, or along the high road, to Miss Jarman's. As not one individual of the party had ever seen the town, the road, the mead, or Miss Jarman, the question was hard to answer; but the reply, "whichever is the shortest way," was safe and considerate; except, indeed, that as much time was consumed in traversing the worse road as would have been expended in covering the longer distance on the better.

In going for the first time to a place, more especially if any circumstances of interest are likely to result from the visit, one feels, however glad for many reasons to have finished the journey, a sort of regret that the moment of arrival is at hand. It is true, that by the preconcerted division of their progress into two days, Mr. Lovell's letter to Miss Jarman, which was to pave the way for Mrs. Harbottle and prepare her aunt for her reception, accompanied by one from herself, would have been in her hands several hours before they reached her residence, still there was something awkward, and almost awful, in their meeting; for Miss Jarman, whose retirement from the world was a matter of choice, had never accepted any of the invitations of the Squire, of whom, however, it was in some degree fortunate she had, from all she had heard of him, formed a very unfavourable opinion. There was one peculiarity for which she was rather remarkable: — with every disposition for conversation, and a good deal of general information and anecdote, she had not the faculty of recollecting any thing in the world which she wished to remember; her mind was as quick and vigorous as ever; and this want of recollection did not in the slightest degree affect her as to persons or objects, or places present, nor did it curb her fancy or deaden her imagination; but it gave to her conversation a strangeness of character, which, to any one — to every one who had not the pleasure of her acquaintance — must unquestionably have the air of caricature. Of this peculiarity, unluckily for her approaching

visitors, they were not, in the slightest degree, aware; and, certainly, if they had not both been absorbed in grief and anxiety, the display of it would have caused, with their perception of the ridiculous, a scene the very reverse of what might be considered genteel in the west of England.

As they crossed the mead, which they did with nearly as much motion as a frigate would feel in a gale of wind off the Cape of Good Hope, the chariot pitching and rolling terribly, the hollow barkings of two or three dogs proclaimed to their ears the position of the house, the exterior of which their eyes were not destined distinctly to see; suddenly their progress was checked by a low green gate; this opened, they moved with somewhat more of ease along a narrow road, until a second gate arrested their career. Having passed this barrier, the post-boy appeared to gain considerable confidence, and putting on his horses, gave a sudden turn into a third gate, and they found themselves wheeled half round a gravel circle encompassing a bosquet of laurel, laurestinus, and holly.

The door was opened, and a servant was ready to receive them. The dogs having duly announced their approach, the ladies alighted, Fanny trembling excessively, and Emma quite as nervous as it was necessary to be in a state of uncertainty as to their reception: the lamp which swung in the centre of the square hall (around which ran a gallery protected by oaken balusters, in which two servant-maids, one holding a candle in her hand, were peeping over to look at the new arrivals,) burned dimly; and as the man preceded them across the marble floor along a path of mat to the door of the drawing-room, Fanny gave Emma a look terribly expressive of her feelings, and which Emma could not help thinking had something regretful in its character, elicited, perhaps, by the striking contrast which the chilly twilight of their new abode afforded to the brightly illuminated, well-warmed corridors and vestibules of Binford.

‘What name shall I say, ma’am?’ said the servant.

Fanny was ashamed of mentioning hers, and Emma afraid to pronounce her own. Harbottle, to be sure, was not a soft-sounding patronymic; however, Emma un-

dertook to be spokeswoman, and informed the servant. The door was thrown open, and presented to view a remarkably comfortable square room, low, but snug ; the doors trimmed with gilt leather, and the windows covered by rich damask curtains ; a thick Turkey carpet concealed the floor, excepting round the skirting-boards, where the well polished oak proclaimed the antiquity of the mansion and the industry of the housemaids : a large wood fire, the first they had seen that year, crackled in the grate, and two small dogs, one a poodle, and the other a pug, both very fat, and both wearing ribands and collars, as if it were a gala day, were dozing on the rug, from which they simultaneously rose to bark at the ladies as they entered.

Some few pictures adorned the walls ; two cages of canary-birds hung near their mistress, and a huge grey cat, with immense whiskers, who had for many years been on terms of the most perfect amity with the dogs, sat close to the old lady's chair, purring and winking in the best possible temper.

" How do you do, my dear niece ? " said Miss Jarman, laying down her spectacles and extending both her hands towards Fanny : " I am vastly glad to see you. You must excuse my getting up ; I am almost a cripple. Miss — Miss — . What is the young lady's name, Budd ? "

" Lovell, ma'am," said the toady.

" Ah ! Miss Lovell, I am happy to see you," continued Miss Jarman ; " what sort of a — journey have you had — I have got your father's letter — we shall discuss that by-and-by — wo'n't you ? — Miss Budd — ring the — pull the — "

Miss Budd understood, and rang the bell.

" And have the goodness to show the — ladies — their — what rooms — ? "

" Sleeping rooms ? "

" Exactly. Take off your things — and we will order — what d' ye call — the — thing — the tea and coffee — to be ready when you come down — "

In ordinary conversation Miss Jarman, who, as the reader already knows, was somewhat advanced in years, got on at the rate we have just ventured to exhibit. It

was when she attempted narrative and tried her hand at the descriptive, that her peculiarities more splendidly displayed themselves.

She was a fine-looking person, and Fanny was much struck by a strong resemblance between the expression of her countenance and that of her late father. Her reception of them was kind and affectionate, and at once set Fanny's heart at rest, as to the effect produced by Lovell's letter and her own ; still she looked forward with a most disagreeable sensation to the conversation which must inevitably take place after tea.

Miss Budd, who had resided for many years with Miss Jarman in the capacity of companion, and had now become absolutely necessary to her as interpreter, or rather "flapper," was a tall, gaunt person, with a long face, and a countenance of immovable inexpressiveness ; and, in her opinion — but which she did not, of course, venture to express — the conduct of the new visiter, in quitting the protection of her husband, was only equalled in baseness on the part of Miss Jarman, by her ready reception of the guilty fugitive under her roof. To be sure, circumstances might be explained ; and a clergyman would scarcely pledge his character and reputation, or suffer his daughter to be the associate of a female, who had conducted herself improperly ; but, however, she would wait and see, and in either case say nothing.

During and after tea the depression of Fanny's spirits became so evident, and her efforts to rally so unavailing, that, by the unanimous decision of the other three ladies, she was persuaded to retire — if not to sleep, at least to rest. The whirl and rattle of the journey, and the varying objects which had met her eye — even abstracted as she had been — kept her mind, during their progress, in a small degree diverted from the undivided consideration of her own position ; but when she found herself seated in a strange house, with persons unknown to her, in a silence unbroken, except by the heavy ticking of a tall japanned-case clock in one of the corners of the room, and contemplated the sudden change which the events of eight-and-forty hours had wrought in her condition, and

recalled that she had chosen her course — that it was now irrevocable — and that the intelligence of the morning from Lovell would, of course, be seriously important as regarded her future character and conduct in the world, she could no longer bear up ; and, accordingly, she was led by Emma and Miss Budd to her bed-room, where, in opposition to their wishes, more especially those of Miss Lovell, she entreated to be left to herself. Her companions returned to the drawing-room, much to the delight of the rigid, frigid Diana, Miss Budd, who hoped that Miss Jarman would take the opportunity of Fanny's absence to extract as much information as possible out of her companion, upon which they might form a better judgment, than they yet had been able to arrive at, as to the circumstances of the case.

Miss Jarman, however, who, besides being better bred than Miss Budd, was, for family reasons, and, moreover, because she had consented to receive and shelter her niece, not at all inclined to throw more light upon the affair than was just necessary, lest a too powerful illumination might betray more than would be agreeable, resolved rather upon leaving the main question untouched, and of making herself acquainted with the disposition and conversational talents of Miss Lovell.

"Have you been much in London, Miss Lovell?" said the old lady.

"Not much," said Emma. "We were always in town for two or three months every year till my dear mother's death ; but, since that event, we have been only twice away from Binford."

"I was very fond of London once," said Miss Jarman ; "but it is so altered, I dare say I should scarcely know it. I am told they have taken up all the — what d'ye call it, Miss Budd?"

"The pavement, ma'am."

"Yes — pavement ; and that Mr. — what's the name of the man who came from the place where that doctor who wrote the — what d' ye call the book with the words?"

"Dictionary, ma'am," said Miss Budd.

"Dictionary—yes," continued Miss Jarman; "where he said the people eat—what's the name of the thing they make water-gruel of?"

"Oatmeal, ma'am," said Miss Budd.

"Ah, oats. He said they eat oats; I recollect now. Well, that Mr. Somebody has taken up all the—what did I say, Budd?"

"Pavement, ma'am," said Budd.

"Ay, pavement; and put down pebbles instead."

"Oh, MacAdam," said Emma.

"Yes, MacAdam," said Miss Jarman.—"Recollect Miss Budd, always remind me of MacAdam—and that must very much have altered the place; and they have pulled down—I forget the name of the place—where the Prince of—psha! the king's eldest son lived, opposite the man with the red—what d' ye call the thing in his button-hole?—the man who used to scrape my—my ——"

"Teeth, ma'am," said Budd.

This, which no doubt appears caricature in writing, was what Emma had to endure *vivâ vozé*; and the ease and volubility with which it all glided over the lips of Miss Jarman, who, being extended at her ease on a huge arm chair, moved neither hand nor foot during her oration, but only turned her head on her neck pivot-wise towards Miss Budd, whenever she wanted a refreshener, was most marvellous.

"Every thing changes," continued the lady. "I recollect when nothing was too gay for me. I never missed a night of the—that place where I used to go twice a week, see what I did not like, and hear what I couldn't understand, and paid three hundred a year for a—what d'ye call the thing?"

"An opera-box, ma'am," said Miss Budd.

"You are not old enough, Miss ——"

"Lovell."

"Miss Lovell, to remember another place that I, as a girl, delighted in, where we used to walk round and round a great room, like so many horses in a mill, to the sound of horns and clarionets, in an atmosphere of tea-

kettle smoke, smelling coffee and muffins—I *do* recollect the name of *that*, Miss Budd—Ranelagh."

"I have had a great loss in being born so late," said Emma.

"Why so?" said Miss Jarman. "As I was saying to Miss Budd, the other day, the discoveries of the last twenty years have been such as to set us wondering, and, as far as *I* am concerned, make one sorry to have been born so soon."

It would be scarcely worth setting down the conversation which was maintained between the two ladies, with the interpolations of the refresher, nor should the reader have been troubled with the small specimen here offered, but to enlighten him as to the sort of society into which poor Mrs. Harbottle had voluntarily plunged herself. Having taken the step, a removal from the protection of her aunt would be destruction; and after a tedious sitting of three hours of forgetfulness and recollections, Emma, not yet knowing the nature or extent of Fanny's provocations to flight, could not help thinking that, if they arose from "incompatibility of temper," as she had been told, she would find the remedy worse than the disease; or, at all events, much upon a par as an experiment with putting on a perpetual blister to cure a temporary disorder.

She visited Fanny before she went to her own room—she found her awake—bathed in tears, and pale as death. It was her own desire that she should not be visited by any of the family until Emma retired to rest—a smile of friendship and affection beamed through the sorrowful expression of her lovely countenance as she extended her hand to her kind companion, and to the enquiry how she felt, her reply that she should be better to-morrow, struck Emma as having something extremely peculiar in its manner and emphasis: there was a wildness and an earnestness, even a solemnity in it, uncommon, unusual in the tone of Fanny's voice, and in her way of speaking; it seemed to imply much more than Miss Lovell could comprehend—the words, too, were followed by another gush of tears.

Emma knew that her father was to write after having seen the Squire ; she had heard him promise that ; and he had promised, also, that she should have a letter from him ; but no letter, let its contents be what they might, could have the effect of altering Fanny's position ; because, although she had sedulously concealed the immediate circumstances which had produced the separation, she had more than once during the journey declared that no earthly power could induce her ever again to see her husband.

At one moment a horrible idea entered Emma's mind — she thought she knew the principles and character of her friend too well to entertain it — yet, for the instant, it flashed across her imagination. She thought that Fanny meditated some rash act by which she should terminate an existence, now, as she had repeatedly declared, grown irksome to her ; but, no ! — a moment's reflection assured her of the impossibility of such conduct on her part ; and although she entreated her to let her sleep on a sofa which was in the room, and remain near her during the night, she felt no apprehension when Fanny insisted upon her going to her own bed, to take the rest of which, after their journey, she must stand so much in need, that she left her in any danger from her own hand.

She enquired of Emma if her conduct had been the subject of their evening's conversation, and felt well pleased with her aunt's delicacy and consideration, when she found it had not been so much as touched upon. The old lady had received both her and Miss Lovell merely as visitors whom she expected, and, conscious how painful any recurrence to the topics, nearest her heart as well as theirs, must be, reserved for a private interview with her niece, at some more seasonable opportunity, those enquiries which she might think proper to make, proving by her warmth and kindness that she was perfectly satisfied with the general impression she had taken of the delicate affair.

Emma, in saying what had not been the subject of their conversation, did not tell Fanny the nature of the conversation which really did take place, nor point her at-

tention to the extraordinary failing of her venerable relation, convinced that Fanny would in an instant detect the old lady's habitual forgetfulness, which in brighter days no doubt would have had its full effect upon her then joyous disposition ; but Emma could not help thinking to herself, that however warm the reception she had met with, and however kind the old lady's manner towards her might be, she was not sorry that her stay was not to be prolonged beyond a week or ten days at the farthest, although she deeply regretted the absolute necessity of leaving her sorrowing friend behind her.

While this most respectable and amiable family are asleep, or at least when

— “ All did sleep,
Whose weary hearts could borrow
One hour from care and love to rest.”

it may not be improper to introduce the reader to another member of it, who did not make his appearance during the evening of the arrival of the ladies, but who had been staying for some weeks at Miss Jarman's.

This other member formed, perhaps, an addition to the old lady's family circle, not exactly anticipated by either of the travellers ; and it might appear strange, even to the reader, that the name of the individual had not even been mentioned during the long conversation between the ladies in the drawing-room.

The individual in question was a young French count, Alexis de Montenay by name, who had been staying, as it afterwards turned out, with Miss Jarman for several weeks. He was the son of an old friend of hers, and having been in some degree Anglicized by education, had become a regular visiter at her house once or twice in every year. The distance at which Miss Jarman lived from Fanny, and the very casual intercourse which existed between them, confined entirely to correspondence, and even, in that respect, restricted to a seasonable letter of good wishes at Christmas, will account for her not having been prepared to find such a visiter there. Indeed, if she had been aware of the circumstance, knowing, as she did, the ill-nature of the world and the vindictive spirit

of her husband, it might have altered her intention of throwing herself under the care of her aunt, whose mansion she considered to be, as, indeed, it looked very like, a sort of Protestant nunnery, in which all the rigid observances of such establishments were maintained, without any of the mummery and hypocrisy so generally to be found in them. But to find the dull circle of Mopeham House enlivened by the wit and vivacity of a French count, an Alexis de Montenay, was what neither of the lady travellers expected.

So, however, it was ; and when Emma was being dressed, the announcement of the fact was made to her by her maid, who not only told her that there was a French count in the family, but that she had seen him—that he had spoken to her—and thence she proceeded to eulogise his beauty and affability, in terms which made Miss Lovell wonder. She felt no gentle alarms, no tender fears for the safety of her own heart, but she certainly *did* think, as far as the sound of the thing went, it was not the most fortunate circumstance in the world as related to her friend, placed, as she was, in so very delicate a situation.

Fanny was made acquainted with the intelligence as soon as Emma visited her, but she was not in a state to take an interest in any thing that might happen. The dread, the anxiety, the wildness, at which Emma had trembled the night before, still oppressed and agitated her, and it was with the greatest difficulty she could speak even to her constant and faithful companion. Her earliest enquiry was “at what hour the post came in?” On the receipt of letters all her anxiety appeared to be fixed ; and when at last they actually arrived, it was in a fit of something like frenzy that she rallied all her energies, and, starting up in her bed, broke the seal of that which she recognised as coming from Lovell.

CHAPTER IX.

I would by contraries execute all things.

SHAKSPEARE.

IT will be recollect'd by the reader, perhaps, that we left Lord Weybridge at his hotel in London, waiting, with his lady-mother, the arrival of Dr. MacGopus and the chaplain to dinner. It is necessary to the conduct of our history to revert to those important personages, and leave our poor suffering friend, Mrs. Harbottle, to the uninterrupted perusal of her much-wished-for despatch. It is also necessary to add, that their expectations with respect to their visitors were only half realised ; the Doctor came, but the chaplain sent an apology for his absence.

It turned out that Lady Frances was extremely pleased with MacGopus ; for, although the Doctor had something *brusque* and abrupt in his manner towards men, he was, by comparison, as soft as oil and sweet as honey to the ladies. His entire want of sentimentality rather operated against him in her ladyship's opinion, and at any other time might perhaps have proved fatal to his progress in her good opinion ; but at the present moment, as he took the turn of rallying George upon his romantic attachment to the Parson's Daughter, it was extremely gratifying to her, most particularly now, that she had herself ascertained, under his own hand, that her son was so entirely devoted to her.

" I told him," said the Doctor, " before your ladyship came to town, what a silly thing it would be to go and commit himself to a young woman like that. I admit Emma is a very pretty name, and is associated in my mind with as charming a creature as ever lived ; and his lordship is pleased sometimes to joke me thereupon ; but I am one person and he is another, and he himself is another person from what he was a fortnight ago."

" Exactly," said Lady Frances.

" And as I tell him, my lady," continued MacGopus,

taking a huge pinch of snuff, “the very change in his position ought, as well for her sake as his own, to make a change in the whole affair. The young body might do admirably well for the wife of a half-pay commander in the navy, who would be ill at ease as a peeress of the realm, and——”

“No—but, Doctor,” interrupted Lady Frances, “George’s position in society is not so much altered by his unexpected accession to the title: he was always of the same blood, you know—noble on both sides—and I should have had just as much objection to the match while he was a commander in the navy, and *my* son, and Lord Pevensey’s nephew, and Lord Weybridge’s cousin, as I have now.”

“Quere, my lady,” said MacGopus, “how did your ladyship’s family come by the title of Pevensey?”

“Oh, hang it,” interrupted George, “what has that to do with the subject we are discussing? The point upon which you choose to give your advice, and upon which we entirely differ, is that of the eligibility of Miss Lovell to be Lady Weybridge. My mother says she thinks I am not one bit exalted by my adventitious accession to the peerage, and therefore the thing is at an end. I quite agree with her; and as I had made up my mind to marry Miss Lovell when I was Captain Sheringham, I can carry that intention into practice as Lord Weybridge, without, as she admits, incurring either her displeasure or disapprobation.”

“Stop, now,” said MacGopus, with an expression of something like anticipated satisfaction at what he was going to say playing about his mouth; “when you was Captain Sheringham, Miss Lovell had not been the companion of a fugitive wife on a runaway expedition.”

“Oh, for shame, MacGopus,” said Lord Weybridge; “how can you attach any importance to that event? Do you imagine that a man like Mr. Lovell, a clergyman of the Establishment, exemplary in every point of his character, would have permitted his child to be the partner of such an expedition, unless he had satisfied himself, beyond the chance of deception, of the purity and propriety of Mrs. Harbottle’s character?”

"I don't know," said MacGopus : "the clergy of your church are no better than they should be."

"And who amongst us is?" said Lord Weybridge : "I am vexed to hear a man of sense and judgment, like yourself, fall into a vulgar cry against our clergy. Take them collectively, or individually, and I will stake my existence, that, with fewer exceptions than are to be found proportionably in any other profession, such a body of men of piety, learning, charity, and benevolence is not to be found on the face of the globe as the clergy of the Church of England."

"George," said the Doctor, chuckling with delight ; "what d' ye think of Dr. Doddipole, of the Grampus, who went to prayers with —"

"Think!" interrupted Lord Weybridge—whose mother, by the way, invariably started back in her chair, and stared whenever MacGopus called his lordship George—"I think he was a disgrace to his cloth ; but you are not to judge the many by the scoundrel few—you are not to stigmatise four or five thousand gentlemen because of their profession there are four or five vagabonds ; nothing in the whole world is more detestable and degraded than a sensual, dissipated parson."

"One thing, if you please," said MacGopus ; "a shabby, sneaking, shuffling attorney—and, exactly as much opposed to the high-minded, gentlemanly, well-bred practitioner in that branch of the law as—"

"Your friend Dr. Doddipole is to my friend Mr. Lovell," said Lord Weybridge.

"Stop, now," said MacGopus, "who is Mr. Lovell ?"

"Why, psha !" said George ; "who is Mr. Lovell ?"

"Don't be angry, my dear George," said Lady Frances, who was not exactly aware of the terms upon which her son and his prime minister were in the habit of living ; "the Doctor didn't remember at the moment."

"Not he—he argues only to provoke me ; and if I were base, mean, and wicked enough to turn my back on this dear delightful girl, to whom I feel myself bound by honour and affection, he would be the first to reproach me with my heartlessness and infidelity."

"Not I," said MacGopus, again taking snuff: "I have said you'll never marry her—I don't see why you should."

"I quite agree with the Doctor," said Lady Frances; "and I am very much indebted to him for having drawn you into so clear a declaration of your feelings and opinions with regard to the young lady."

"I see no necessity for disguise," said George, "and therefore cannot perceive the great advantage derivable from the Doctor's perverseness and ill-breeding."

"My dear!" said Lady Frances.

"Oh, my lady," said the Doctor, as deliberately as if he had been fighting or amputating, at both of which performances he was universally allowed to be a remarkably steady hand — "that's only *his* way of talking — it is mighty easy to call that ill-breeding which does not exactly suit our fancy at the moment. I know, professionally, that no physic is pleasant and no operation particularly agreeable. But the patient, when his cure is complete, is always grateful to the Doctor, although he wishes him at Old Nick while he is actually suffering under his discipline."

"All that," said Lord Weybridge, "is vastly fine and vastly clever, I dare say, and may amuse my mother; but I do not see what earthly right you can possibly have to interpose advice in a cause where you are retained by neither party."

"It puts your Lordship into a passion," said MacGopus, "and that's something."

"It does put me into a passion, and I admit it," said Lord Weybridge; "and when you are in one of these infernal humours, I most heartily and sincerely wish you at Jericho."

"Quere, now," interrupted the Doctor — "about Jericho — do you think that the Zakoun of our time is the same thing as the old balm of Mecca?"

"Stuff!" said his lordship.

"No stuff at all," said the Doctor; "I have been there and tasted the Myrabolam, the date, and the opobalsamum,

and I wanted to know if you could give me any information."

"The deuce take it all!" exclaimed his Lordship, unable any longer to endure the torture of the Doctor's imperturbability, and starting from his chair, he bounced out of the room, banging the door after him with a report like that of a thirty-two pound carronade.

"There," exclaimed Frances, "now he's off."

"He'll come back again, my lady," said the Doctor, taking more snuff:—"your ladyship has known him longer than I have, but I have seen more of him than your ladyship has—he ought not to marry this young lady—he is not pledged to her—and—"

"My dear Doctor," said Lady Frances, "I am sure you will forgive my earnestness; but, seeing how completely we agree upon this point, let me entreat you, use the influence you possess over him and put an end to it—I have secured him from visiting Binford."

"Stay, my lady,—where's Binford?" said the Doctor.

"Binford?" said her ladyship, not yet perfectly aware of the Doctor's peculiarities, and wondering at the question—"why, Doctor, Binford is the place where my cottage is, and where——"

"Oh, I see," said the Doctor. "Go on, my lady."

"I say, I have effectually prevented his return there; at all events, for the present."

"Stop, my lady," said the Doctor—"why should you prevent his returning there?"

"In order," said Lady Frances, "to put an end, if possible, to his connection with the Parson's Daughter."

"Quere," said MacGopus—"why should you wish to put an end to his connection with the Parson's Daughter? Many peers have married parsons' daughters—many peers are parsons themselves. If she is good, and amiable, and accomplished, I don't see——"

"Why, mercy on me!" interrupted her ladyship, "haven't you yourself been arguing against the connection? Haven't you yourself pointed out all the numerous objections?"

"To be sure I have," said the Doctor, with one of his

subdued laughs, "but that was only for argument's sake. George is all for marrying her; I therefore differ from him. You are altogether against the match, upon totally different grounds; therefore I differ from your ladyship."

"How extremely provoking!" said Lady Frances; "then you were not in earnest when you supported me in my views while my son was present?"

"Never more in earnest in my life," said MacGopus.

"I really do not comprehend your character, Doctor," said Lady Frances, somewhat angry.

"You never will," said MacGopus. "Your son is old enough — wise enough — and now rich enough, to make a choice; why should I interfere? If I advised him not to marry, he would still marry if he chose; and I should have the satisfaction of making his wife my enemy for life, with the certainty that she would make him hate me too; and if he followed my suggestions, the same results would arise, with this only difference — that, in addition to herself, all the young lady's family would hate me into the bargain."

"But he considers you his prime minister — his first counsellor."

"No, he does not," said MacGopus. "If he respected my advice, or cared for my opinion, he would not bounce about and burst out of the room."

"But you irritate him by your inveterate coolness, which is so strongly opposed to his own fervour and volatility."

"That's the only chance I have of keeping him steady," replied the Doctor. "Your ladyship will see in a quarter of an hour, when the effervescence has subsided, he will come back again, a most calm and reasonable creature."

"For my part," said Lady Frances, "I do not think calmness always a proof of rationality."

"I do," said MacGopus.

"Why, now," continued her ladyship, "look at George. You talk of his effervescence subsiding — I know that, with all that appearance of unsteadiness and thoughtlessness, his attachments are firm and lasting."

"They are no such thing, my lady," replied the pro-

voking stoic ; " I have seen more of his attachments than you possibly can have seen — he 's a weathercock — a dog-vane. The scud in the sky is not more easily affected by the wind than he by variety. At Madras, he ——"

" Yes, yes, my dear sir," said Lady Frances ; " but those were youthful indiscretions, and mere heartless flirtations, and ——"

" No such thing, my lady," said the Doctor : " each one of them was just as serious as the present affair ; but change, change did it, and may do it again. I don't advise, as I have already said ; but if you want this Parson's Daughter to be driven out of his head, throw him into the society of something new — and pretty — and gay — and graceful, and you 'll see the result."

" It is the very experiment I am about to try," said her ladyship : " I mean to persuade him to collect a small agreeable party at his place in Worcestershire, and amongst them I shall secure one or two families of the very best sort, who have amongst them three or four of the most attractive girls of the year."

" Do no such thing," said MacGopus ; " find out one family with one daughter, and have them down if you please. If she is amiable and handsome, she will appear ten thousand times more amiable, seen quietly in domestic life, without the excitement of rivalry, or the compulsion to show off. Let her be fair, gentle, and unassuming in manner — accomplished but not showy — kind without pretension — and pious without ostentation ; — and, above all, let her be a good daughter ; — for of such stock come good wives."

" Why, my dear sir ! " exclaimed Lady Frances, " you have exactly described the young person to whom he is at this moment attached. She is all you require for him."

" Why, then, how can you be so silly as to oppose their marriage ? " said MacGopus, chuckling in an under tone, at having hit her ladyship hard.

" Silly, sir ! " said Lady Frances, who was more puzzled by her new acquaintance than by any body she had ever met with ; " I am not conscious that it is silly to

require something more for a person destined, as George is, to move in a higher sphere."

"He requires no such thing, my lady," said the Doctor. "If Providence has given the young woman virtue, beauty, and ability, and disposition to make a husband's happiness, you ought to be thankful to that same Providence for having given *your* son the power of securing that happiness, by placing her in a sphere which, by your own account, she seems destined to adorn."

"Well," said Lady Frances, getting almost angry, "I have met with many people — but I declare I never did see so extraordinary a person as yourself."

"I'm not in the least extraordinary, my lady," said MacGopus; "I speak plain truth."

"But you blow hot and cold in the same breath."

"No I don't. You think I do as the foolish countryman did in the fable. I like to argue; I like to look on both sides, my lady."

"Then you mean to say that I am extremely silly, or selfish, or worldly, in opposing my son's marriage with Miss Lovell?"

"I mean no such thing," said MacGopus. "I cannot enter into your ladyship's views, because I never was a marquess's daughter, nor a baron's mother. I only say what *I* think — I cannot appreciate what *you* feel."

"Well, but then, why support this marriage?"

"I didn't," said MacGopus. "On the contrary, I told you how you might put an end to it."

"I shall adopt your advice."

"It wo'n't succeed, if you do," said the Doctor.

"Why, five minutes ago you said it would."

"So I did," said the Doctor; "but then your ladyship had not told me what sort of person the Parson's Daughter was. I had heard George speak of her; but I have heard so many lovers describe their mistresses, that I have learnt to put but very little faith in their accuracy. Your ladyship, however, admits the likeness to what I supposed would win him, and to what he himself depicted as a portrait of his beloved. That alters the case."

"Why, then," said her ladyship, "we end where we began."

"No we don't," said the Doctor. "I started by opposing the marriage — now I end by supporting it."

"Have you become rational yet?" said Lord Weybridge, opening the door, and addressing the Doctor; "may I come in, and sit down in peace?"

"As far as I am concerned, yes," said the Doctor; "for I am going. I always conceive, when my host abandons *me*, that it is time I should retire. I did not think it right to leave her ladyship alone; but now that you have thought proper to return, I'm off."

"To-morrow we start," said Lord Weybridge; "so sit down and finish your wine."

"I have finished my wine."

"Will you have some more?

"None, I thank you."

"Come, Doctor," said Lady Frances, "stay for coffee."

"I never drink coffee, my lady."

"Do not go this minute," said her ladyship, who, not being yet accustomed to the strange, abrupt manners of the Doctor, felt assured that if he departed in his present humour, he would never return.

"I must," said MacGopus.

"Well, shake hands," said Lord Weybridge. "Good-night, old fellow. Will you come down to Severnstroke? — we shall be there for a week or ten days, I dare say."

"We'll see. If Lady Frances wants my opinion or advice, perhaps her ladyship will summon me," said the Doctor, again laughing to himself with exultation at having, as he truly enough believed, puzzled her ladyship as to his character most amazingly.

"I," said Lady Frances, with one of those smiles for which she was *renommée*, "shall be always happy to see you."

"Ah," said the Doctor, "your ladyship is very good." And so making his bows, and shaking hands with mother and son, the gallant philosopher betook himself to his Tusculum in the New Road.

CHAPTER X.

— Tears
Stood upon her cheeks, as doth the honey-dew
Upon a gather'd lily almost wither'd.

SHAKSPEARE.

IT would be impossible properly to describe the sensation produced upon Emma and her friend by the contents of Mr. Lovell's letters. That to Fanny announced the result of his interview with the Squire, as well as his promise neither to follow nor molest her, and a declaration of his intention to make her an annual allowance of three thousand pounds per annum ; a resolution which appeared so liberal in its character to Emma, that she ventured to hope it might, by exhibiting to Fanny not only the strength of his affection for her, but his conviction of her perfect innocence from every imputation which circumstances, or the misrepresentation of servants might have cast upon her, induce the lady to overlook the past, and return to her home and her natural protector ; but all her avowals of admiration of the Squire's conduct produced only a faint smile upon Fanny's countenance, changed almost instantly to an expression, which convinced her friend, that the offence, whatever it might be which he had committed, was considered unpardonable by his lady, and that their separation was irrevocable.

But even her own position, and all the circumstances connected with it, appeared to occupy but a secondary place in the mind of Mrs. Harbottle. The dreadful intelligence of Harvey's death had thrown into shade all selfish considerations ; and although it appeared to Emma that she exhibited less wildness of manner, less eagerness and anxiety of mind, after the fatal catastrophe had been announced to her, than while she was occupied solely with her own peculiar grief and misfortunes, the helplessness and wretchedness, against which she had during the previous days struggled, appeared entirely to overcome her.

She had exerted herself to take the deciding step of her life, and, under the operation of that stimulus, had endured much of mental excitement and bodily fatigue. The suspense, in which she naturally existed until she heard the result of her husband's conversation with Mr. Lovell, was now terminated ; she knew her fate ; she knew that, by the line of conduct Harbottle had been induced to pursue, her character was cleared — her quitting him justified. So far the circumstances of her case were altered ; while the death of one whom she had so much esteemed, and who was remotely the cause of the general break-up at Binford, coming so suddenly to her knowledge, changed the nature of her feelings, and excited in her bosom, which before had been agitated by her own personal distresses, a new and deeper feeling of regret for another.

"I am easier at heart to-day," said Fanny to Emma ; "I can cry — but, Emma — happiness for me is gone for ever."

"My dearest friend," said Miss Lovell, "you must, indeed, calm yourself ; this dreadful accident to poor Charles Harvey —"

"For mercy's sake," said Fanny, "in pity, spare me ; never, as you value my existence, name his name. Poor ! poor Charles Harvey ! — he is gone ! There can be no harm now in owning how much I esteemed him, how much I admired him. But, dearest, dearest Emma, henceforward, from this hour, name him not !"

"Rely upon me," said Emma ; "although I cannot but deeply grieve to see you so much affected by —"

"Affected !" interrupted Fanny. "Oh ! Emma ! Oh ! if I could tell you all I have suffered ! — all the horrors —"

"Again," said Miss Lovell, "let me entreat you to calm yourself. Trust to my discretion ; never again will I touch upon this subject."

"Poor, poor Charles !" again sighed Fanny, as her head dropped on the pillow, already bathed with her tears.

Lovell's letter to his daughter was little more than a duplicate of that to her friend, except that it omitted some of the details which hers contained, connected with Har-

bottle's arrangements, under the circumstances of her separation. Harbottle had himself left Binford, and several of the servants had been discharged ; but he proposed, it appeared, to return thither, in order that he might maintain his dignity and respectability by entertaining some parties of his convivial companions at the Hall, and thus exhibit his independence of spirit and strength of mind ; for, although he never could venture to suggest that the loss of his wife was the consequence of any misconduct of hers, he was determined that nobody should suppose him to be so weak of purpose or undetermined in character, as to be shaken or affected by her voluntary and sudden separation from him.

Amongst the principal points in Lovell's letter to his daughter, his anxiety for her return home appeared particularly prominent ; and she replied to his desire to see her back again, that she should only delay her journey home-wards until Fanny was sufficiently restored to be able to enter into the ordinary amusements and occupation of Mopeham House.

It was not until the expiration of the third day, that Fanny felt herself competent even to join the family circle down stairs. She was anxious to explain to her aunt the conditions under which she alone would consent to continue an inmate at her house ; and Miss Jarman was delighted, from the conversation which passed between them, to find that the allowance proposed by her husband was so liberal, as at once to stamp his view of the circumstances under which she had fled from his society ; but it was not at all difficult for Fanny to perceive, that she had taken a step for the preservation of her character nearly as desperate as that adopted by the memorable nuns of Cottingham ; and that no vestal ever was buried alive in greater security than she should be, immured in her present domicile in the society of Miss Jarman and her friend, Miss Budd.

The young Count Alexis de Montenay, who made his appearance after breakfast, was, to be sure, a great relief to the general dulness of the *coterie*. There was a gaiety and grace in his manner — a playfulness, natural and constitutional, which rendered all he said agreeable, and all

he did amusing. He appeared to pay more attention to Emma than Fanny ; and it must be admitted, that Emma, in the naturalness of her character and disposition, seemed to encourage a preference, which, within such limits as she proposed for it, there could be no great reason for her concealing.

The occupations of the Count, and his amusements, kept him a good deal separated from the ladies ; he breakfasted and dined early, so that it was only in the evenings that they had much of his society ; his time was much occupied in acquiring the English language ; and, in order to begin his favourite study betimes in the morning, he generally retired early to rest at night.

Mrs. Harbottle appeared to take more pleasure in his society than her friend, although, as has already been observed, the Count evidently preferred Emma to her ; and his little *galantries* spoken in a foreign language with a broken accent, amused and pleased both the ladies. Had it not been for him the monotony of Mopeham would have been dreadful ; the mistress of the house moved out never, and never permitted Miss Budd to quit her — a pony phaeton, chiefly for the conveyance of the Count to the town, about half a mile distant, was the only carriage on the establishment, and the only presentable neighbour lived at a considerable distance. However, Mr. Lovell had been directed by the Squire to inform his lady that whenever she wished it, her own chariot, with her favourite pair of horses, should immediately be sent to her ; and the Squire further added, that he hoped she would make no scruple in letting Mr. Lovell know when she desired to have it.

Altogether, the separation between these people had something in it very extraordinary ; and Emma, who never could extract the real truth from her friend, began almost to be a convert to Harbottle's cause : she had heard Fanny here, at the very last moment, calling upon the name of the man to whom she had confessed herself almost attached, and seen her decidedly more affected by his death than by any other event which had occurred during the whole progress of the affair ; and here was her husband, deserted, and avowedly detested by his wife, loading her with liber-

ality, and heaping favours and attention upon her, even in the minutest particulars.

That Emma's mind ever misgave her, or that she for a moment doubted her father's propriety in permitting her to accompany Mrs. Harbottle, cannot be said ; but it must be admitted, that so many odd, and to her inexplicable, circumstances had occurred since their departure from Binford, that she felt every disposition to obey her parent's injunctions, and return home, as soon as she possibly could, without disarranging the comfort and tranquillity of her friend.

While things were thus proceeding at Mopeham, Mrs. Harbottle gradually recovering from the excess of grief into which she had been plunged, Emma looking forward to home, and Count Alexis gaining ground every day in the good graces of both ladies, Lord Weybridge, who doubted a little the accounts brought to London by his lady-mother of the events which had occurred at Binford, and startled a little by her earnestness and activity to prevent his return thither, took occasion, the day before their departure for Worcestershire, to write to Lovell in the most friendly terms, telling him that he had heard from Lady Frances of the sudden flight of the Squire's lady, and of her being accompanied by Miss Lovell — that although he felt he had no right to make any further enquiries upon the subject, he could not but recollect the happy hours he had passed in his and Miss Lovell's society ; which recollections, added to the deep interest those associations had inspired, induced him to enquire what the cause of separation between Harbottle and his lady really was, perfectly certain, that, having permitted his amiable and exemplary daughter to accompany the lady, he could have no difficulty in furnishing him with such information, as might, by justifying Mrs. Harbottle, entirely exonerate Miss Lovell and himself from the charge which might otherwise be adduced against them, of protecting vice or supporting impropriety ; that he was quite sure what the answer he should receive would be — that the anxiety he felt upon the subject would, he trusted, be a

sufficient apology for the intrusion ; and he remained, &c. &c. &c.

To this letter Lord Weybridge received the following answer : —

“ Binford Rectory, Oct. 4. 18—.”

“ Dear Lord Weybridge,

“ In acknowledging your lordship's kind letter of yesterday, permit me, in the first place, to return you my sincere thanks for the interest you are good enough to express for myself and my daughter. I do assure you, that nothing can be more gratifying to me, nor I am sure more agreeable to her, than to feel that we are not forgotten under the circumstances which have occasioned your lordship's removal from our neighbourhood.

“ Being thus flattered by your attention, it naturally follows that your lordship should feel anxious for some information upon a point which, I admit, places the characters of three persons in a very doubtful position. If I could explain the circumstances under which Mrs. Harbottle so promptly decided to quit her husband, I should have no difficulty in exonerating her and ourselves, who, in the minds of many here, and I fear in the minds of some who are gone hence, are labouring under a suspicion, if not of impropriety, at least of incaution beyond vindication ; but I cannot do it — I can afford you no satisfactory reason for the lady's flight — no justification for her abrupt departure. Our characters must stand or fall by the tenour of our foregone lives ; and we are, it must be admitted, considerably strengthened by the fact, that Mr. Harbottle, who is looked upon by many as an injured man and a deserted husband, has bestowed upon his wife a most liberal allowance, has removed from his service the domestics she declined to take with her, and, in short, exhibited, by every means in his power, his conviction of her innocence and propriety.

“ The real ground of their disunion is incompatibility of temper. This is admitted by both parties. The immediate cause of their sudden separation, therefore, matters little ; and if it did, as I have already said, I am so pledged

to *her* that I could not explain it even to your lordship, whose good opinion I am so anxious to retain.

" My daughter will remain with her friend only as long as it appears essential to Mrs. Harbottle's comfort and the safety of her health. She will then return ; but, I apprehend, the best days of Binford are past. The Hall, I suspect, if not deserted, will be occupied by persons not exactly suitable to our quiet habits, and Lady Frances, I apprehend — your lordship, of course, knows best — has quitted Dale Cottage for ever.

" I was quite sure what your lordship's feelings about poor Charles Harvey would be. The circumstances are peculiarly painful : it seems that he met with Colonel Bradfield's shooting party accidentally, and having joined it, was invited by the Colonel to dine with him. At this dinner some bets were made about the relative strength of wines, or quantities of wine which different men could drink ; and Harvey, who had been in extremely low spirits during and after dinner, was induced to swallow more port or claret, or whatever the wine suggested for the experiment might have been, than he was in the habit of drinking ; he had no servant with him when he left Colonel Bradfield's, but rode off with one or two of the neighbours from whom he parted at some point of the road, and made directly across Broustead Common, on his way to the Mordaunts, with whom he was on a visit. He knew the country well, and, if he had been perfectly collected, would have remembered that a gravel-pit had been opened in the middle of the common, right in his path from road to road, and which was most shamefully left without any railing or other protection. It was in this pit he was found with his horse, both dead, soon after daylight, when the labourers came to work in the morning. In the fall of the horse poor Harvey had pitched over its head, and the spine was dislocated : he had else no mark or bruise about his person, and must have died instantaneously.

" His remains were removed to his own place in Berkshire, from Mr. Mordaunt's, whither they had been conveyed after the coroner's inquest had been held — a ceremony perfectly useless on this occasion, except as esta-

blishing the fact of finding the body by certain individuals. There never was a more gentlemanly being created, and never, that I have seen, a more general display of unaffected grief than his premature death has occasioned.

" I shall not fail to acquaint my daughter with your kindness in making enquiries after her. The day may come when I, or, if I am gone, she may be enabled to explain our present mystery; but if I duly appreciate your lordship's feelings towards us, I think I may venture to hope that you will give us credit for having acted neither imprudently nor improperly, but as became Christians; I should, however, add, that at this moment Emma herself is as ignorant as your lordship of the *immediate cause* of the separation. Before I die, if circumstances do not permit of her knowing it earlier, I shall confide it to her for her own justification; but, as I assure you most solemnly and sincerely, it affects no human being except the parties themselves, its immediate declaration, if it were not prevented by the most important considerations that can exist, would reflect not the slightest shadow of blame upon Mrs Harbottle, who, with myself, must alone remain in possession of the truth.

" I mention this, because, even supposing me to blame, it is I who am wholly to blame; Emma is, I repeat, entirely ignorant of the facts of which I am in possession, and, in supporting and accompanying Mrs. Harbottle, acts not only under my sanction, but with my advice, both of which she considers sufficient justification for her own conduct, without stopping to investigate that of her father.

" In the sincerest wish and prayer, that every happiness may attend your lordship through life, and with gratitude for your kindness and the interest you continue to express towards us,

" I remain, dear Lord Weybridge,

" Your lordship's faithful servant,

" W. LOVELL.

" Lord Weybridge.

" P.S.—There is a probability, if I should be sufficiently strong, of our being in London before Christmas;

should your lordship be in town at that period, we shall hope to meet you."

This letter, which, according to Lord Weybridge's desire, the Rector addressed to him in Worcestershire, and which his lordship duly received there, was not sufficiently satisfactory for him to show to his mother as a sort of "certificate" of the family prudence; however, when he recollects that, in her first letter on the subject, she suggested that Emma had taken the journey without her father's sanction, he felt comparatively easy — not that his doubts and misgivings were entirely at rest. It seemed so strange that a young woman should be forced or persuaded into such an excursion, without knowing what grounds her companion had for undertaking it, that between his apprehensions on the one hand, and the constant worry to which he was exposed on the other, by the persuasions, and suggestions, and insinuations, and declarations of Lady Frances, he began most certainly, not to waver in the constancy of his attachment to Emma, but to doubt, more seriously than he ever yet had done, whether it were likely to terminate propitiously.

According to her well-devised design, Lady Frances persuaded George just to visit the "dear" Duchess for a day or two on their way into Worcestershire, and to invite her and her lovely daughter to accompany them — a bidding which they most readily accepted. And then, on his approach to Severn Stoke, he was welcomed by his tenants with bands of music and garlands of flowers, and passed under triumphal arches built across the road; and there were roastings of sheep and ringings of bells; and the bright eyes of Lady Catherine, and the Duchess full of vivacity and gaiety, were gleaming and sparkling around him; and the gentlemen of the county were mustered there to give him a cordial reception, and the bettermost inhabitants of the neighbouring town, and amongst them the clergyman and his daughters; and when the Lady Catherine began to ridicule the two gauky girls, who stood blushing up to their elbows, George felt an inward horror; but whether of the *gaucherie* at which the aristocratic ladies were sneering, or

at the idea of having a wife of his own, perhaps, subjected to a similar ordeal, it is impossible to say. Certain it is, that from the day of his arrival at Severn Stoke, until the expiration of a fortnight, he thought less of Emma than he ever had thought of her during any similar period of time since their acquaintance had first begun.

Events had occurred during that fortnight which could not have been foreseen ; and while George was in the hands of his friends, gradually melting into their opinions, and leaning towards their advice, Emma was unconsciously entangling herself in an affair at Mopeham, for which, perhaps, the reader is not altogether prepared.

It was clear that the plan of domesticating George with one agreeable family, which had been suggested by Mac-Gopus, had been to a certain extent successful ; but, beyond that particular circumstance, the change of his position in society did a great deal towards diverting his thoughts into new channels. He was sensitively alive to the force of ridicule ; and the incessant fire kept up by his mother, the Duchess, and her daughter, upon the school of girls, of which he felt himself conscious Emma was a disciple, had the effect of hindering his speaking of her as he had been formerly accustomed to do, while the varied attractions of the brilliant creature with whom he was now constantly associated engaged his attention and occupied his thoughts.

Lady Frances, who anxiously watched over the process of ridding his mind of an object, the exclusion of which from it, was the height of her ambition, did not fail to enlarge upon the unsatisfactoriness of Mr. Lovell's letter, which (after all his doubts respecting its character) her son had shown her ; his doing which it must, however, be admitted was a strong proof of his own improved opinion of its nature and value. A severer blow, however, awaited him than the apparent imprudence of Emma's flight with Fanny, and one which certainly threatened to complete the work of which Lady Frances had so ingeniously laid the foundation.

CHAPTER XI.

Against the head which innocence secures,
Insidious malice aims her darts in vain,
Turn'd backwards by the pow'rful breath of heaven.

DR. JOHNSON.

FANNY's recovery at Mopeham was slower than Emma had hoped. We have already seen that, after the arrival of the letter announcing the death of their poor friend Harvey, her grief appeared to take a more settled character; and the tears, which, by an effort she had previously checked, flowed in torrents from her eyes.

To Emma, this continued appearance of unmitigated sorrow, in common with every thing connected with Harvey, was extremely painful. She saw in her friend's manner a depth of interest displayed, whenever the slightest allusion was made to him, or his untimely fate, which did not appear at all consonant with the professions she had made before Emma undertook the mediation between them, and which, to a certain extent, justified, in Emma's mind, the violence which she concluded must have been adopted towards her by her husband; which violence her separation from him was calculated to expose to the world, and in which exposure her father had permitted her to be so painfully and prominently connected.

" My dearest Fanny," said Emma, who was anxiously hoping to be permitted to return to Binford, " you really should struggle with the feelings which you express with regard to poor Charles. Nobody can more deeply regret his loss than myself, and under such circumstances; but separated as you now are from your husband, and intimate as you previously were with Mr. Harvey, the devoting your undivided regrets to his loss cannot fail to give an idea that you are more interested about him than, in point of fact, is quite consistent with your present position in society, and which may, to ill-natured persons, afford the opportunity of saying, or at least a reason for thinking, that your

disunion from Mr. Harbottle was caused by some discovery on his part of a too favourable opinion of yours towards his friend."

"His friend!" said Fanny. "Oh! such a friend! Heaven knows, and you know, Emma, every feeling of my heart towards Charles Harvey. You know the sacrifice I made to what I considered due to my husband and myself. Surely — surely *you* cannot believe that I permitted any feeling to exist in my mind which could call for censure?"

"Do not misunderstand me," said Emma, who feared she had wounded her suffering companion. "I know you: it is not in *my* mind that you will suffer by the course you are pursuing. I mean that to those people who will, when you are well enough to see them, visit you here — your aunt herself — and especially to her friend and companion, Miss Budd — your constant recurrence to the one subject — will have — nay, as far as the last person is concerned, I believe, has had, an appearance the least desirable."

"Emma," said Fanny, "if I could tell you all — if I dare open my heart, you would wonder rather that I am alive than that I lament so deeply the death of our poor unoffending Charles."

"Why, Fanny," said Emma, smiling faintly, "you this moment told me I *did* know all the secrets of your heart connected with him."

"All but one," said Fanny. "One — one remains untold, and must remain so. But I repeat what I have before said, which, as you appear to think, is inconsistent with what I have said since, that as far as thought, or wish, or act is concerned, my acquaintance with and affection for Charles Harvey were, from first to last, as disinterested and unimpassioned, as your present intimacy with Count Alexis de Montenay."

"The cases are not parallel," said Emma. "The Count delights me, I admit. The natural frankness of his manner, the *naïveté* of his character and conversation, are to me charming; but then —"

"Oh, my dear Emma," said Fanny, "you need not vindicate yourself, or endeavour to extenuate your most

justifiable affection for your young friend. I merely mention *that*, as the most immediate instance to which I would compare mine. I meant really neither more nor less than that my regard and affection for Charles were as perfectly divested of every tender feeling, as your friendship and regard for the Count are."

"Then why — why, let me ask you, once for all," said Miss Lovell, "why, in reflecting upon the very important events of the last few days, do your thoughts ever and incessantly cling to the one point? You endure the parting from your husband — you sustain the shock of quitting your home, and of leaving the friends who loved and esteemed you — you are content to endure the malice and slander which the world will doubtless endeavour to accumulate upon you ; and all these without a sigh. But the moment Charles is mentioned —"

"Oh, do not question me," said Fanny ; "in justice trust me — in mercy spare me! I am innocent, but irreversibly wretched. Your father knows all ; he alone must know it ; and knowing it, he sanctions my conduct by giving me your society. He pledges himself to my aunt, who, like yourself, is in ignorance as to the real cause of my separation from my husband. Never, therefore, press me more, but let me weep. My tears are my only consolation ; they are guiltless, but they must have way."

Emma found it was in vain to touch this theme ; and the voice of Count Montenay on the staircase, calling on Emma to come and take her accustomed ride, induced her, rather than permit him to see Fanny bathed in tears, to obey his summons, and take leave of her friend, promising not again to recur to the theme of their past conversation, but still advising her, as much as possible, to check a sensibility which she knew had seriously attracted much of the notice of her aunt and Miss Budd.

Miss Budd was, as we know, of a most rigid turn of mind. Long past the age of love or hope, her disposition had curdled, and she was the most inveterate enemy of any thing which savoured of levity of manners, or gaiety of temper. The Count, who was universally a favourite with every body else, was considered by her as far too lively to

be proper, and much too presuming to be correct ; and his free and easy manner of running about the house, and calling for this lady, and hunting for another, and his dancing and his tricks, which in the exuberance of his spirits he was remarkably fond of exhibiting, kept the antiquated virgin in a state of agitation, from which she hoped to be relieved in a few days, when that volatile visiter was to leave their else quiet, blest retreat.

Emma made no secret of the pleasure she took in the society of the gentle Alexis. They became inseparable companions ; and Miss Jarman, whose character was exactly the reverse of her faithful companion's, if she could but have recollected them, would have made numberless jokes at their expense.

In the course of this agreeable intimacy, Emma received, as indeed she had expected, a letter from her father, which perhaps it may be as well to submit to the reader, as giving a slight sketch of the state of Binford.

"Binford, Oct. 19. 18—,

" My dear Child,

" Another week has elapsed, and still you are absent ; this worries me — not only for that I love your dear society, but because I fear Mrs. Harbottle does not sufficiently rally to permit you to quit her — I have not, therefore, written to her to-day, lest I should increase her agitation by recurring to scenes and circumstances, in which she must be so much and naturally interested. You can read to her such parts of this letter as you may conceive she would like to hear ; but it is better, I think, to leave to conversation any remarks upon our town and its inhabitants.

" Mr. Harbottle is in London — he returns, I hear, next week ; it seems that he is mixing in all the gayest — if the most mischievous scenes in town, even if this dull season of the year, may be called gay — and is described by a friend of mine, who met him one day last week, apparently reckless in his career : he did not make the slightest reference to Mrs. Harbottle, in the conversation he had with my friend, but invited him to the Hall for the

hunting season, as he had always done before. Most of the servants have been discharged, and a new domestic administration is formed, of which his old minister, Mr. Hollis, is the premier.

" Dale Cottage is deserted ; Lady Frances left this suddenly, and went to her son in London, after which they proceeded together to his place in Worcestershire ; he wrote me a long and kind letter, to which I returned an answer, giving him all the account I could of your expedition into the west, but I have not heard since.

" It is curious that you should have met Count de Montenay in a place where I never should have expected to find such a person — your account of him is most favourable — tell him that I quite well remember his late father, and that we were great friends during the time he resided in England ; and tell him, that if he feels inclined to visit me, I shall be delighted to receive him, for as long a period as he can spare, at the Rectory. It is quite curious to see how connections come round, and quite romantic that you should have found the son of an old friend of mine domesticated at the house of an aunt of a friend of yours.

" You must use your own influence, and my entreaty, with Mrs. Harbottle, to check the violent grief with which you tell me she continues to be afflicted : melancholy as all the circumstances of the case are, she ought to feel comparatively happy that she has nothing in the world to reproach herself with. The subject is one upon which I most unwillingly touch, and I must entreat of you, when you return to me, to abstain from recurring to it. I make this request, because I perceive in your letters a strong disposition to enquire more particularly into some parts of the affair ; and I am bound, as solemnly as man can be, to divulge none of them ; it will, therefore, spare both of us time and pain, if we come to this right understanding now. I know you too well to expect a question upon the subject, after this gentle admonition.

" I have seen nobody since your departure : your aunt is, of course, still with me, and is very much affected, I may almost say distressed, at your absence. I believe, from what she has heard, that Lady Frances takes a very

unfavourable view of your expedition ; but rely upon your own conscience, your sense of duty to others, and have faith in your father. I hear from the same quarter — a correspondent of her ladyship's — that the party at Severn-stoke are extremely gay, and that the Duchess of Malvern and her daughter, Lady Catherine, are there. I suspect Lord Weybridge — kind as the tone and manner of his letter to me is — is not exactly what our friend George Sheringham was. His ideas, they say, are princely ; the improvements he projects in Worcestershire, magnificent ; and the preparations making for his reception at his town house, in the spring, carrying on upon the most brilliant and extensive scale.

" It is curious to peep through the loop-holes of the world, and see the extraordinary changes and mutations of society, and the suddenness with which they are effected. Who, a month since, would not have chosen to be Harbottle rather than Sheringham ? — the one, rich beyond care ; the other, poor, and in a perilous, though noble profession ; and now, to see the one elevated to nobility, and affluence, and consequence ; and the other, debased and degraded, and a wanderer from home, from the comforts of which he is cut off by his own misconduct !

" Make my kindest remembrances to your friend ; bid her calm herself, and tell her, that in my opinion the sooner she lets you leave her, the better for herself. New objects, new associations, will relieve her mind, which cannot fail to be filled with her own affairs, so long as she has you constantly with her. My best compliments await Miss Jarman, for whose very kind letter I am much obliged : owing to her having forgotten to put the address on it, it had a circuitous journey to find me ; however it arrived safe, and I am quite happy to find that her niece has made so favourable an impression.

" Again I say, Emma, come — come home, the moment you can do so consistently with Mrs. Harbottle's health and wishes ; and if you choose to volunteer a seat in the carriage to the Count, and see no impropriety in making the offer, I shall be glad to have him here for a week or ten days, on his way towards London ; tell him so, and see if

you can prevail upon his excellent hostess to part with him. Once more, farewell ; may every blessing await you, and good providence bring you back to the fond heart of your affectionate father !

“ W. LOVELL.”

“ I see how it is, my dear Emma,” said Fanny to Miss Lovell, when she had read such parts of this letter to her as she thought proper for her to know, “ your dear, good parent is wretched and unhappy without you — so shall I be — but what are my claims upon you compared to *his* ? so, as I cannot have you always with me, I shall insist upon your returning home immediately.”

“ My father, you see,” said Emma, “ seems to think that my quitting you will be a relief to you — you will be forced more completely on your own resources ; and you must, whether you like it or not, mix with the more general society of the house. I certainly have a mind, if I go, to engage the Count as my cavalier.”

“ You don’t really mean it ?” said Fanny : “ I never heard of such a scheme.”

“ My father sanctions it,” said Emma, archly ; “ and when he supports me with his approbation, I never enquire why ; I take it for granted that he is anxious to receive a visit from the son of his old friend, and sees no sort of impropriety in our travelling together. I confess I perceive none.”

“ I haven’t a word to say,” said Fanny ; “ it sounds odd, but — ”

“ Yes ; but to us, who know the real state of the case — ”

“ As you say,” interrupted Fanny, “ in the state of your heart, I don’t think there will be any serious danger in it.”

Miss Budd, however, was of a very different opinion when the proposition was made. The Count was literally overcome with joy, which he displayed with perhaps more sincerity than civility towards the lady of the house in which he had been so kindly received, when Miss Lovell mentioned her father’s wish to see him at Binford. It was so convenient — all the way on the road — and then his

dear Miss Lovell, or Emma, as he even ventured to call her sometimes, for a companion on the journey : but Miss Budd, although she said nothing, looked vinegar and verjuice ; and Miss Jarman, having declared that she could not interfere to prevent so pleasant an excursion, could not let the subject drop without warning Emma to take care of her — “ what do you call the thing on one's left side ? ”

“ Heart, madam,” said Miss Budd.

“ Yes,” said Miss Jarman, “ of her heart ; on the road homeward.”

The caution was the work of supererogation. Emma's heart, unfortunately perhaps, was not hers to lose ; and although she found Fanny so entirely absorbed with her own affairs as to leave her no time for the discussion of those of her friend, the very anxiety to hear of George — nay, the desire again to see the place where she first had met with him, preyed upon her spirits, and considerably sharpened her readiness to obey the calls of duty, and return to her paternal roof.

A day or two afterwards, she again tried her friend upon the subject of their separation ; and Fanny, conscious as we have already seen she was, of the uneasiness which Mr. Lovell was suffering from the absence of his darling daughter, spoke more calmly and composedly than usual of her return. The terms upon which they separated were, a constant and continuous correspondence ; and the condition, that nothing should interfere with the daily communication of their feelings, hopes, fears, wishes, and intelligence by letters ; a few more similar conversations gradually moderated Fanny's dread of losing her ; and early on the following Thursday Emma quitted Mopeham, having taken leave of Fanny the night before, without disturbing her in the morning from a sleep which she had procured by means of an opiate, and in which it was held best, by the counsel of ladies, she should remain, without undergoing the pain of parting from a friend whom she so dearly loved, and whom it was quite uncertain when she should see again.

That Count Montenay accompanied Miss Lovell on her return is a fact which must not be concealed. They

started by day-dawn, so as to reach Binford to a late dinner, the necessity of sleeping on the road being obviated by the absence of the invalid, whom they now left behind them.

It might, perhaps, be thought rather edifying to detail the conversations which passed between the independent "Parson's Daughter" and her French friend; but they would scarcely repay the trouble of putting them to paper. The Count, roused earlier in the morning than usual, was silent and even sleepy; and after affecting to be extremely gay and playful for about half an hour, threw himself into a corner of the carriage, and, after struggling with his somnolency for some time, went into a sound nap, while Emma, not sorry to be left to her own meditations, after a fortnight or three weeks constant "talk," placed herself in a similar attitude in the other corner, and, lulled by the motion of the chariot and actuated by the force of example, also fell into a most agreeable slumber.

Anxiously, as the day went on, did the excellent Lovell listen for the sound of approaching wheels; six o'clock came—no Emma: seven—no Emma: the ticking of the clock on the chimney-piece sounded louder and heavier to him than usual, amid the stillness which he and his sister preserved, in the hopes of hearing the welcome roll of the carriage. At last, the ringing of the bell, the barking of the dogs, and the trampling of horses, announced the approach of his darling child; and at half-past seven the faithful Emma was safely clasped to the heart of her kind and anxious parent.

Lovell was overjoyed to see the Count, whom he received with every mark of kindness and hospitality; and Miss Lovell the elder pronounced an opinion to Emma, after dinner, that she had never seen any thing so handsome in her life, especially French. The travellers were, however, too much fatigued to "show" to advantage that night; and, therefore, after tea and a brief converse, they retired to the rest of which they appeared to have so much need.

It turned out, perhaps unluckily, that the Squire had returned to the Hall on the very day of Emma's departure

from Mopeham. As he was aware that she had been the companion of his wife's extraordinary flight, it was most natural he should seek an interview with her, in order to make some enquiries concerning her; and Lovell, who was particularly anxious that no such interview should take place between Harbottle and his child, was in a sad state of worry lest he should make his appearance at the Rectory, in spite of a prohibition which he had received from the Rector on the morning of their dialogue with closed doors.

It was just the day of trial:—if he did not make the experiment of calling that evening, as he was alone at the Hall, or next morning before his expected company arrived, the probability was that he never would subsequently attempt it. He had written to Fanny at Mopeham; but with an obdurate resolution, which Emma at the time endeavoured to soften, his wife returned the letter unopened, and it was from Lovell alone that she would receive the information that he had made arrangements for the payment to him, in trust for her, of a sum of three thousand five hundred pounds a year, to be entirely at her own disposal, being, in fact, the same amount as her jointure would have been, had she become a widow.

Lovell was quite convinced that if Harbottle met Emma, or conversed with her upon the subject, he would in some way commit himself, or entangle her in the discussion, which, upon every account, it was most desirable should be avoided; and therefore it was, that he doubly rejoiced in the presence of the Count, who from being (as of course he would during his stay at the Rectory) the companion of Emma's walks and rides, would destroy the chance of a *tête-à-tête* between her and the Squire.

There were many events near at hand which were little expected by any of the Rectory party, when they laid their heads upon their pillows, on the night of Miss Lovell's return. As the Rector said, it was wonderful to see the suddenness of human mutations, and with how little warning or preparation the greatest changes are effected. But there was one thing which yet remained unaltered and unchanged, and that was the affection of Emma for Lord

Weybridge: of the stability of that feeling Lovell was perfectly convinced in less than half an hour after his child's return, and, to say truth, he saw it with pain, for he had heard more of the proceedings at Severnstroke than he had thought it necessary to tell his daughter.

Of the servants—admirable chroniclers—who were left at Dale Cottage, one of the maids was in the habit of corresponding regularly with the tall man in the plush garments, who accompanied Lady Frances to London and thence to Worcestershire. There was a *tendre* existing between them; and the hopes and wishes of the servants' hall were, therefore, intimately interwoven with the proceedings of the superior members of the family. From this maid-servant, the elder Miss Lovell's maid derived much information; and it certainly appeared, upon putting together all the different circumstances which the knight of the pluses detailed in his different epistles to the virgin of the ginghams, that Lord Weybridge had given strong evidence of an intention to make Lady Catherine his wife. The maid, who knew enough of her own family concerns to be quite aware of her young mistress's *penchant* for the noble lord, felt she was doing her old mistress a kindness to open her eyes to the deceitfulness of the peer, which the maid at Dale Cottage most emphatically contrasted with the constancy of her long and liveried correspondent.

From the elder Miss Lovell to her brother this news was thus as it were subterraneously conveyed; and amongst the different subjects which glanced before her eyes in contemplating the varying and evanescent qualities of mundane matters, the insincerity and heartlessness of George, who had, by every means in his power, evinced his feelings towards Emma, was not one either of the lightest or brightest character. He knew her tenderness—her devotion—her enthusiasm; and he felt sure that such a change in his conduct as the intelligence from Worcestershire seemed to threaten, would go nigh to rob him of the "prop that did sustain his house." It was this fear and apprehension that induced him to encourage the notion of receiving the gay Count Montenay at the Rectory, in the hope that he might serve to divert his child's thoughts from the one en-

grossing subject, and by dividing her time between the Count's agreeable society and the graver duties of her ordinary domestic life, save her some of those pangs which those only who have lived for years in the lingering suspense, to be at last betrayed, can even guess at. How the reverend gentleman's notable scheme succeeded we shall see in the sequel.

CHAPTER XII.

She wrote to him a letter,
And she seal'd it with a ring.

Old Song.

THE reader has now seen that a constant communication was kept up between the reduced establishment at Dale Cottage, and those servants whom Lady Frances had with her, at her son's ; and although her ladyship's woman might not, upon ordinary occasions, choose to hold "gentle converse" with a man in livery, still when an anxiety for information once seizes the female mind, high or low, many smaller sacrifices are made to the one great object ; and accordingly Mrs. Hall made no scruple of culling intelligence from Robert the footman, touching affairs at Binford.

Through this channel, low and dirty enough to be sure, Lady Frances herself condescended to obtain intelligence of her *ci-devant* neighbours, of whom, it must be admitted, she was particularly jealous and suspicious in as far as her darling George was concerned ; more especially after the disclosures unintentionally made to her in the misdirected letter from London, which held firm hold of her mind in opposition to his since apparent indifference ; and, therefore, in the hope of picking up a few pearls, her ladyship permitted herself to dabble in the muddy stream of *domestic* correspondence which "tided" between Binford and Severnstoke.

The imaginative disposition of travellers, in their descriptions of scenes and events, is universally admitted ; not less certain are the inventive powers of an ingenious letter-writer, more especially when his sphere of action is confined, and the incidents which have occurred to him few—he or she, in such a case, feels it necessary to enliven the mortal dulness of plain fact with a dash of romance, and reward the reader for poring over a page or two of business, by affording him at least an equal portion of more lively and generally amusing matter.

This was the case with the red-elbowed correspondent of Robert the footman : she wrote about him and about herself, to show the interest she took in him, and to maintain the interest which she truly believed he felt about her. But, in order to entertain him and exhibit the versatility of her own genius, she mixed in her letters much information upon “ affairs in general,” to which, it must, however, be admitted, she was more particularly induced, by the solicitude of Robert to “ tell him something of what’s going on,” made, as we have ascertained, at the suggestion of Mrs. Hall, under the direction of her noble mistress, who kept her eye upon the yet quiet village which she had left, as the skilful geologist watches, with deep anxiety, the place where a volcano exists, but which has ceased, for some time, to exhibit its smoke and flame, in expectation of some violent convulsion. It seemed to her ladyship all mined ground ; and we know enough of her, to be assured that her dread of a match was unconquerable.

The letter, which produced the strongest effect upon her ladyship, and which, as it contained scarce any thing about love, Mrs. Hall borrowed of her fellow-servant, under the pretence of wishing to read it alone, but in fact to submit its contents to her lady, we think it may be as well to subjoin, as a specimen of the style and character of a correspondence doomed so materially to affect the destiny and happiness of two personages of such importance as the Right Honourable George Augustus Frederick, Baron Weybridge, and Emma, only daughter of the Rev. William Lovell, M.A., Rector of Binford, and perpetual Curate of Ormersly, and which, as indicative of the beauties of do-

mestic literature, may be found not quite unworthy of notice.

" Dale Cottage.

" Deer Robert,

" Yours of Sunday cum safe to and,—I am mutch obliged to yew for hall you say, as wel as for Missus Alls civilarity ; ples mak my ruspecks too her, and ope she is well. as for youre aving ad my air put into a lochete, i niver cud ave thot of sich a thing and shall never foggit it.

" Yew ask me for noose, noose here is scace. This place isn't the same since yew went. The Squirr is at the all, but no sich doins as wen Missis Arbottle was there—all mail creturs now, not a phemale cums nigh the plaice, and the Squirr always inhebrewated. Miss Ollis is gon to toun with her brother Gorge,—they say to be marred to some rich man ; but this I think is all fuge, and bleve the Squirr is not so thick with Ollis has eretofore, and as hor-dered them of. Mister Ollis was very much shagreened at the suppuration.

" Miss Hemmer Lovell is returned, but not Missis Ar-bottle, which has said she shall nivir come back to the Squirr, because thy say he beet her, the nite she went away in the morning—and thy say she was so black and blu with the brewses that she would not take Missus Deffon with hur on account she shud not see the whales wich were to be seen playing round her boddy. Miss Hemmer has not cum aloan. she has brote home a bow wich I have not seen. a french lord—I here he is very ansum and that Miss Hemmer is very fond of him—her maid you now is as close as whacks and theres no gitin nothing out off her, speshally to sich as me—wot she is amungst the ladys I cant say, but I sed to her yestardy nowing ow fond Miss Hemmer is of Lord W. that I was afraied she was cockgetting about with this french nobbelman, and she laffed phit to kill husself. wech I tuk to meen that eyes right in my conjectures howsowver Robert i never middles nor mucks which i am sewer is the whysest whey.

" We ad a goose on Miclemus day wich pot me so in mind of yew, because of what yew used to say about good luck ; and we drunk hall habsent frends. incloodeng my

Lord and my Lady Phransis wich i ope is in jood ealthe as i am at present. and so is the knary burds and the vergin knyhtangull wich as been a malting but as now in eye pheathir.

" So jood bye, send me sum noose of your sylph and wen yew think it likly you shall cum here, for I feel quit dissolute without you and mop aboat all day for yewer sack— sins the Squirr has begun to shoote the Peasants on his hestate, there is more company at the All and sevril grums and helpers hat the Gorges but I never goes out of the gait, except in the ducks of the heavening praps to Mrs. Hervins for hany triffling things we wants—the hold ooman and i are good frends, and if we ad yewer sockity I shud be ass apie has the dey is long. Adoo, no more at present, giv mi luv and komps to Missus All from

" Yewers truly and fatfully

" MARY GREEN."

Humble as is the style—strange as is the orthography, and uninteresting as the matter of this letter might, by some, be supposed to be, to Lady Frances it was every thing. Madame de Sevigné never wrote any thing half so delightful to her, as Mary Green had written. Emma Lovell returned — coqueting with a young French nobleman ! under her father's roof — here was an accession of incident for crimination in the eyes of her son — a defection from prudence, even from virtue, as her ladyship made it out, of which the Parson's Daughter had been guilty, in accompanying a fugitive wife from the arms and house of her husband, followed up by an *affaire de cœur* with a young foreigner carried on under the paternal eye. This was a new charge in the impeachment of her honour and propriety, or perhaps, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, we might say a new *count* in the indictment. But however delighted her ladyship was with so much of the discovery as she had already made, she was anxious to obtain further information before she actually sprang the mine which was not only to annihilate the lunette, but to blow the citadel itself to atoms, by ascertaining the name of the new lover. How to do this she scarcely knew : — it

was clear that a French title was not likely to "come to hand" at all in its proper form through the medium of such a "speller and putter-together" as Mary Green ; and how else could she get at the intelligence she wanted without committing herself to somebody in Binford, and betraying an interest in the Lovells, which she was most anxious nobody in the world should imagine her to feel ?

Her ladyship yet had one resource. There was one person to whom she could write, in his professional character, who would be so highly flattered by her application for advice made from under the aristocratic roof of Severn-stoke, that, dazzled by her condescension, and blinded by his own vanity, he would, upon a very slight provocation, be as communicative as she could wish. This was Popjoy, he of the Galen's head — the smart, smug, neat, and dapper apothecary, whose rosy-cheeked assistant her ladyship had proposed as a suitable match for Emma, and to whom she could, as if accidentally, refer, in order to draw him out upon the subject of the Parsonage politics, and so, as she believed, secure the information which she now so ardently desired.

She knew George to be constitutionally sensitive with regard to the deceptions of women. She had already brought him into a very favourable state of mind for her further purposes, by devoting herself and enlisting into the cause of persuasion, and, as has already been said of ridicule, the Duchess and her beautiful daughter — George was already more than half convinced of the impropriety of Emma's conduct ; and that half conviction led him back to a reconsideration of her former conduct with respect to Harvey, and made him doubt the sincerity of Mrs. Har-bottle's estimate of Emma's affection for himself ; and then he, naturally enough, asked himself how he had obtained any assurance of Miss Lovell's regard and esteem, and as naturally answered himself through the medium of a third person, a lady who almost immediately after the conversation which he had with her upon this vital subject had eloped from her husband, and made this very Miss Lovell the partner of her flight.

Lady Frances had watched him during his residence at

Severnstoke — there had been various changes of visitors — the Duchess and her daughter remaining however fixtures — she saw that George had made no new confidences — that although he would occasionally seem dull, his dulness lasted but a short time. He mixed willingly in all the amusements of the day and all the entertainments of the evening, and she saw that Lady Catherine had succeeded in attracting and even fixing his attentions and regards : they tacitly fell into each other's society, joined in the same pursuits, and, in short, at the end of the month, the stay at Severnstoke which was originally only to have occupied a fortnight, was again lengthened at George's own proposal ; and Lady Frances felt sure that, before the next fortnight ended, matters would take the turn she so much desired, and that the *Morning Post* would speedily have to announce the approaching nuptials of Lord Weybridge and the beautiful Lady Catherine Hargrave, third daughter of her Grace the Duchess of Malvern.

But still, with this conviction on her mind, Lady Frances thought the *dénouement* of the French count would at once produce the crisis she was so anxiously anticipating — that her son would turn suddenly round from the disclosure of the falsehood and frivolity of the sly and silent Emma, and make an instant declaration to the splendid creature who had been now so long domesticated with him, and who bore in her countenance all the beauty for which her illustrious family had been so long distinguished, and in her mind all that, which Lady Frances held to be essential in the world, and of which it was quite clear the Parson's Daughter possessed not one atom.

Thus excited, and thus resolved, the Lady Frances Sheringham, after having condescended to read Miss Green, her housemaid's letter, written in confidence to Mr. Robert Long, her ladyship's footman (that confidence having been violated at her ladyship's own suggestion by her ladyship's own woman Mrs. Hall), sat down to address herself to her own apothecary at Binford. Perhaps the reader who is offered the perusal of her ladyship's epistle, without making any such sacrifice as those which her ladyship made in order to obtain a sight of Miss Green's, had

better see what her ladyship said to the Binford Paracelsus.

" Severn Stoke House, Oct. 1830.

" Dear Sir,

" I do not know how it is, but the camphor julep which I get here is totally different from that which you were good enough to send me when I was at Binford : somehow the camphor curdles in the liquid, and is extremely unpleasant to my palate. I am going I know to be very troublesome, but if you could do me the favour to make me up two or three good-sized bottles, and have them packed carefully, I should feel extremely obliged. Perhaps you would take the trouble to let some of your people carry them to the Cottage, and the servants there will forward them without any farther inconvenience to you. It may be, that the difference in the julep is imaginary, and occurs only from the sort of feeling we naturally have towards any medicine from which we have derived benefit in particular time, and from particular persons. I am sure I have every reason to be grateful for your professional care of me.

" I hope Mrs. Popjoy and your very nice daughter are quite well. I expect very soon to hear of her marriage. I am sure you will not keep her to yourselves long. I know nothing of Binford politics here, and any thing you can tell me will be interesting, for I quite love the neighbourhood.

" I was very sorry to hear that there seems no chance of a reconciliation between Mr. and Mrs. Harbottle. They were excellent people, and I never felt greater regret than at their unfortunate separation. I conclude dear Miss Lovell is returned to her amiable father. I hope you did not mention to your young gentleman, I forget his name, what I hinted about a match in that quarter — I am sure she would be a treasure to any deserving husband.

" With many apologies for the trouble, and begging you to take my compliments to your lady and Miss Popjoy,

" Believe me, dear Sir,

" Your obedient, humble Servant,

" FRANCES SHERINGHAM."

"What!" said Lord Weybridge, who happened to see the direction of this unsophisticated letter, "are you in correspondence with our village apothecary?"

"Professionally," said Lady Frances.

"Ah, dear Binford," muttered the Baron, as his pen traced the word on the envelope, "I could have been happy enough there."

"Where is Catherine?" said Lady Frances, who heard this soliloquy.

"Oh!" said Lord Weybridge, "I am going to ride with her almost directly. I have written to ask my old doctor here."

"I'm glad of it," said Lady Frances — which she was not.

"I don't know whether he will come," said his lordship. "He is an odd fellow—but he is an excellent fellow, and I want to talk to him."

Lady Frances did not half like this apparent desire for an adviser, for she guessed that something important was in her son's mind; and believing it to be the doubt whether he should make his offer to Lady Catherine, she did not fancy MacGopus quite the sort of person to admire the high-bred woman of fashion, and feared lest he should eulogise, as a contrast to the decided nonchalance of her polished manners, the retiring modesty of Miss Lovell, which he had often heard praised, and of which, from what he had heard, until somebody agreed with him, he professed himself the decided admirer.

To oppose his visit would be destructive to her plan of acceding to all Lord Weybridge's present propositions, and making the *séjour* at Severnstroke as agreeable to him as possible. She, therefore, appeared cordially to acquiesce in the invitation, satisfying herself by a determination, first to discover the history of Emma and her new gallant, and then to insure the Doctor's most violent opposition to her by vindicating her conduct in his presence, which she now knew enough of him to know would produce the effect she most desired, from the lips of the man to whom her son looked up with respect and veneration in matters of dis-

cretion and judgment. Thus, while Lord Weybridge was applying to one medical friend for counsel upon some important question, which he was revolving in his mind, his mother was consulting a minor member of the faculty upon a point of equal importance to *her*, and which, in all probability, might turn out to be identically the same.

The real truth appears to have been, that George began to feel himself daily getting more and more entangled in the web which his mother, and the Duchess, and her daughter, had been weaving for him. Lady Frances had succeeded in bringing him to feel the impropriety of Emma's conduct, and, as has been just mentioned, he had no proof direct, no testimony coming from her, either of her affection for him, or vindicatory of the extraordinary step she had taken. Mr. Lovell's letter, in answer to the one he had written, was any thing but satisfactory ; yet, with all these accumulating doubts, he felt himself pledged to her, although he also felt that the pledge had been given to a person under very different circumstances, at the time, to those in which she was now placed.

George was not insensible to the attractions of Lady Catherine — nor was he blind to the course he was pursuing. That love formed no part of the inclination he felt for the Duchess's daughter, was plain, for his heart still lingered at the Parsonage ; but he was conscious that with all the admiration he felt for his fair visiter, the constant association, the anxiety of both mothers for the match, the connection, merits, and charms of the young lady herself, nothing was required but finally to cut all connection with Miss Lovell in order to bring the other matter to an immediate conclusion. He felt that he could love as he had loved Emma but once in his life — were he sure of her fidelity, and convinced of the propriety of her conduct, he would not hesitate to make any and every sacrifice to redeem the pledge he had given her — but upon that point his doubts had been excited, his fears awakened, and therefore it was he wished to consult his Mentor. What a delicate crisis was now approaching, and how curious that, at such a moment, when a feather might turn the scale Lady Frances should have opened, by dint of her surpris-

ing activity, a fresh source of intelligence, which must, if confirmed agreeably to her anticipations, make the scale kick the beam.

Having ascertained that MacGopus was invited, it became Lady Frances's earliest duty to put the Duchess and the young lady *au fait* as to the character of that worthy personage ; and, accordingly, all his merits were, in the first place, displayed to their knowledge ; then came the corrective exhibition of his defects, and the whole history of his peculiar disposition to contradict ; to all of which her ladyship thought it necessary to allude, lest her grace and the younger grace, her daughter, should suddenly take alarm at the abruptness of the new visiter and shorten their stay at Severnstroke — a course of proceeding which would have been most particularly disagreeable to her ladyship.

The party, after various fluctuations, was again reduced to themselves, with occasional additions, at dinner, of one or two dependents of the house, in the shape of the provincial attorney, the rector, whose living was in my lord's gift, and the medical gentleman, with whom Lord Weybridge was perfectly certain the Doctor would have some serious disagreement the very first hour they met, and who was consequently to be invited the next three days, in order that he might not expect an invitation for the next fortnight after.

It appeared altogether as if things were drawing to a close ; and that although it would be impossible for a marriage to take place in the family for some considerable time, it seemed as if the arrangements for such a consummation were very speedily to be made, and rendered irrevocable.

CHAPTER XIII.

I would be drunk —————
To stupify the sense of inward torment.

LEE.

IF the reader should be at all desirous of knowing how things were proceeding at Mopeham, the readiest way of satisfying his curiosity will be to permit him the same sort of inspection of the last letter which Emma Lovell had received from Fanny, as he has already been allowed in the cases of Mary Green and Lady Frances Sheringham.

“ Mopeham, Oct. 9. 1830.

“ My dear Emma,

“ Every day increases my regret at your absence. In vain I try to rally — in vain endeavour to divert my thoughts from the horrors of my own position. I have received a letter from my husband, which is in character, both contrite and affectionate ; he seems to have entirely abandoned those suspicions of my levity and impropriety of conduct which he so cruelly expressed before our friends and visitors ; and yet if he has so satisfied himself, I can in no degree understand how he yet exists. He solicits my return to Binford, promises entire oblivion of all that has passed, and tells me, that he has discarded some of those of his establishment who could not fail to be odious to me, and that even his principal favourite, Hollis, is on the eve of departure.

“ I have answered his letter, and have written to your father, enclosing a copy of that answer. I have firmly and strenuously refused to listen to any suggestion as to my return to Binford Hall, or to any farther association with him. Indeed, I can hardly fancy how he could have brought himself to make the request. His feelings must be more extraordinary than even I imagined, as, if ever the day comes when I may speak out, you will, I am sure, agree with me in thinking.

" At the present moment, considering how I am placed, and considering how happily I should be situated with regard to yourself, if I returned, independently of the resumption of my position in the house of my husband, I have no doubt that your first impression will be unfavourable to the firmness of my resolution not to go back. But when I repeat to you that it is impossible, all comment upon the course I have adopted, and still persist in, may be spared me. I am content to remain here, forgotten by the world, I hope, and seek solace and consolation for what is past, in pursuits, to which, perhaps, I had before devoted too small a portion of my time, and to the task of self-correction and humiliation, of which I stand so much in need.

" Placed by my husband's pecuniary liberality in comparative affluence, I am endeavouring to profit by the right example you have set me. I have already planned a school, and have raised a subscription upon your system, for furnishing the neighbouring poor with comforts for the approaching winter, and have found myself encouraged and supported in my efforts by our clergyman here, who seems, in his degree, to emulate all the virtues and merits of your excellent father, as I in mine am endeavouring to make myself a worthy follower of his daughter.

" My poor aunt, whose decreasing memory ceases to be a joke, such as, if we had been in our usual spirits when we arrived here, we should have been inclined to consider it, grows more and more oblivious every day ; and Miss Budd, who sees in me a rival near the throne, is more cross and ill-natured than ever. She is quite safe as far as I am concerned, for I have no desire to influence my poor aunt one way or the other ; although, it must be confessed, her partiality for her niece, in preference to her ' eligible companion,' is nothing so very marvellous, if we could but make her think so.

" So you have kept our young friend at the Rectory till now. This surprises me, knowing what the object of his journey eastward was ; but, when you tell me he will probably remain with you till Christmas, I am strangely puzzled. He certainly is a very captivating person, and

we miss him here extremely. Even Miss Budd smiled upon him. Pray remember me kindly to him, and tell him, I expect he will not forget his promise of writing to me.

" My health, dear Emma, keeps pace, I regret to say, with my spirits. Indeed, the intimate connection of our mental and bodily affections I have long been aware of ; for in those days of what were called my gaiety and happiness, the illnesses of which I so often complained were always occasioned by mental sufferings, which then it would have been undutiful, and now would be useless, to express. I have, perhaps, enjoyed some bright, sunny hours, and none more bright and sunny than those which I have passed since I knew you ; but they are all outweighed and obliterated by occurrences, such as, perhaps, few women ever were mixed up with, and none, in my position in society, could ever have anticipated.

" I see by the newspaper — which we get here once a week, three or four days old — that Lord Weybridge is still entertaining a party at Severnstoke. Pray tell me, have you heard nothing from him ? Possessed, as you are, of the secret of his heart, you need apprehend no change in such a mind and character as his. Rely upon it, Lady Frances will use every endeavour in her power to keep him from Binford ; and, from the provoking circumstance of your absence the day he came to visit you, and when I saw him, the devoted, ardent lover, ready to throw himself at your feet, the link was broken, which you cannot attempt at present to re-unite ; for it appears to me to be as impossible for your father to recommence a correspondence with him, as it would be for you to evince any desire of renewing your acquaintance.

" This unfortunate combination of events I feel most deeply, because I cannot be blind to the mischief I have unconsciously done to your brightest prospects. Years of sorrow and repentance will not free my mind from this conviction, nor relieve me from the misery I suffer in consequence. But of this I am sure, that whatever worldly evil may assail you or cross you in your path to happiness,

your piety, your virtue, and your excellence in every moral duty must eventually triumph, and secure you the enjoyment of every temporal comfort.

" My aunt desires to send her affectionate regards to you, and her love to the Count, whom, when she can recollect his name, she calls *dear Alexis*. Miss Budd is half scandalised at such terms of affection ; however, even *she* transmits her best remembrances. So you see, having carried off our general favourite, you must content yourself to be the channel of our general regards. Tell your dear, good father, that when it is quite convenient, I should like to hear from him, and have his opinion about my answer to Mr. Harbottle. Tell him the letter required an immediate reply ; and being tolerably well assured beforehand of his acquiescence in my views, I ventured to send the answer without consulting him. Indeed, from circumstances which I need not repeat, I am not quite certain that the letter was not written and addressed to me here, in order to ascertain whether I was not somewhere else ; this, in my mind, added to the importance of answering by return of post.

" Write, my dear Emma, for you are better able to do so than I am. I grow so unaccountably weak — I rally — I exercise faith and hope, and, in some small degree, charity ; I struggle with my fate and my feelings, and put my trust in other and better things than those of this world. But I have a sad pain on my heart which weighs me down, and which I cannot overcome. Farewell, dear Emma, and believe me affectionately yours,

" FRANCES HARBOTTLE.

" P. S. — I wish — I know you will forgive me — I wish you could find out for me where our poor friend Charles Harvey was buried. All we heard was the name of the house to which his body was first carried after it had been found. I conclude his remains were removed to his own home. It would be a melancholy satisfaction to me to know this. Perhaps your father can tell ; ask him *from me*. Emma, adieu ! "

"So," thought Emma, "her mind still lingers there; her heart still yearns for news of him, even though he be dead. There is nothing in her letter which my father may not see. She bids me ask this last, yet leading question. He shall read it."

Lovell did read it, and Emma gazed on his fine, expressive countenance with intense anxiety as his eyes followed each line. Accustomed to watch and comprehend each turn of his features, she looked intently till he came to the postscript: she saw no change — no anger — no surprise — no strong emotion as he read it. On the contrary, a benign smile of pity and affection played on his lips, and all he uttered was, "Poor soul!"

Lovell was able to give her the desired information; and directed Emma to tell her, that the remains of the unfortunate Harvey, after having been, in the first instance, carried to Mr. Mordaunt's, were eventually removed to the church of the parish in which his property was situated, (and which, indeed, comprised nearly the whole of it,) and there interred; and that his uncle, who succeeded to his fortune, had just taken up his abode in the house on the estate, where he proposed to establish his permanent residence.

"Count," said Lovell — who, as it may be remembered, had persuaded this sprig of French nobility to remain at the Parsonage for a much longer time than he had originally intended — "how do you reconcile it to yourself to make so many conquests? Why, here are the united regards of a lady separated from her husband, and two entirely single ladies into the bargain, all in one letter."

"They are very good," said the Count, smiling, and dashing away the curling locks of raven black hair from his high snowy forehead; "you must send my love back to them, Miss Emma."

"You may depend upon it I will, Alexis," said Miss Lovell; "but I cannot help thinking that you will be spoiled in England."

"Trust me," said the Count, in that sort of broken

English which is so extremely winning, "it shall take a great deal to spoil me."

"Extremely modest," said Emma: "some of us think that enough has already been done, and done, too, with no little success."

"Ah! Miss Emma!" said the Count, "you are so droll — but I don't mind — I know you don't really think so."

How far the Count's assertion might be borne out by his experience in such matters, it does not become us to determine, certain it was, that Emma never seemed half so happy as in his society; and Lovell himself, who saw — for who could be blind to it — the pleasure his daughter received in the company of her gay and amiable visiter, was quite restless and uneasy if the Count were absent for any length of time; in fact, it seemed as if he were completely domesticated at the Parsonage, and the elderly ladies in the Paragon began to talk and wonder what it could mean, and why he staid — and why he did not go — wonderments of which they were not likely to be speedily relieved, as the Parsonage was one of the houses in the parish into which the members of the "tea and toast" society of Binford put not their feet.

The reader must have already perceived that, with all the shrinking delicacy and diffidence of the blue-eyed Emma Lovell, the mind that was enshrined within that delicate casket was vigorous and independent — resolute and unbending. Conscious of the rectitude of her intentions, strong in the purity of her conscience, and implicit in her obedience to her father, she needed only to be confirmed in the impulse of her feelings by his sanction to defy all the envy, the calumny, and the uncharitableness of the world. In the case of Harvey and Fanny — satisfied herself at the moment of the excellence of her friend, and feelingly alive to the delicacy and difficulty of her situation, she had stepped from the quiet sphere of her good deeds into a position most arduous for one so young and so inexperienced. She confided in the propriety of her own motives — she spoke the plain language of truth, and she triumphed.

Then, when the blow fell, which after all divided Fanny, for whom she had already made this incipient sacrifice,

from her husband, another call was made upon her fortitude and friendship — this was a step too deciding and too decisive to take without the sanction of her father — that sanction given was never questioned, and the lovely girl set forth upon a pilgrimage to rescue and support her friend.

The last case — this present one of Count Alexis Montenay — other young women might have been squeamish, and have affected a false delicacy in making the long journey homeward alone with a young French nobleman, without either chaperon or bodkin, to play propriety in the carriage. Not so Emma : her father had with pleasure recognised in the Count the son of an old and early acquaintance, and solicited him to make a visit to the Rectory — the course was obvious — indeed so obvious, that Mr. Lovell himself suggested that the Count should be his daughter's companion. Emma took no more thought about it, but assumed her seat in the carriage with as much confidence in herself, and as little care for the world's malice, as if she had been going on a similar journey with her aunt Lovell, or her starched friend Miss Budd.

But, with all this firmness and independence, her heart was gentle, tender, and kind ; and however anomalous it may sound, convinced as the reader must be of her devotion to George Sheringham, the only solace she found in her sorrows on his account she received in the society of the Count ; and herein she only displayed another proof of the admirable regulation of her mind and passions. In every action of her life, she was more familiar with the Count Alexis, than she had ever been with George. Alexis with all his national gallantry would kiss her hand — sit by her side for hours — and yet she felt neither diffidence nor difficulty in the enjoyment of his conversation. She was conscious that her heart was in other keeping, and was perfectly confident that however much she might admire the *naïveté* and vivacity of her young French friend, she was in no danger of being inspired by a sentiment likely, in the slightest degree, to endanger her sincerity or weaken her constancy.

There are people who would act unwisely thus to tamper with their passions and feelings, and amongst the number

we should class Lord Weybridge himself ; but there was a constitutional firmness and integrity in Emma, which rendered it a matter of impossibility to change or deteriorate the character of an attachment formed as hers had been for George Sheringham.

At the Hall, the proceedings were very much what Miss Mary Green, in the “viridity of her intellect” described them. The people by whom Harbottle was surrounded had more of fiends than friends about them ; and the orgies, which had been before in some degree modified by the presence of his lovely wife, were now continued throughout the night, and drunkenness, incessant and unmitigated, reigned throughout the mansion. As for Harbottle himself, he remained sometimes for two or three days together in a state of insensibility, either sullenly silent, or raving incoherently ; indeed the only sign of life or intellect he gave one morning, after about eleven hours sitting, was displayed when two or three of the servants endeavoured to lift him from the floor of the dinner-room to carry him to bed. Raising himself on his arm, upon this memorable occasion, he stammered out, “Stand off — stand off, I say, or I'll lodge an information against you at the Excise Office — I have swallowed more than a dozen of wine — you must not move me without a *permit*.”

This lucid interval was followed by shrieks and shouts most sonorous and inharmonious, and he was lifted into his truckle bed in the little room adjoining the library — for he had never set foot in his own room after Fanny's departure, nor even gone up the staircase which led towards it — and there he relapsed into the state of unconsciousness, in which he slumbered away the greatest part of his now wretched existence.

One effect had been produced upon his character, which threatened to leave him very shortly shorn even of the hangers-on, who literally lived upon him, and for what they could get out of him. His temper, which till now had been variable, and at times boisterous, was formerly enlivened by occasional gleams of bright sunshine, and he was for hours together good humoured and gay. Now all this had turned to moroseness when serious, and ill nature

when excited. The coarsest negatives couched in the coarsest language were his ordinary replies to the observations of his boon companions ; and his conversation was made up of oaths and imprecations, adopted to give greater force to the expression of his hatred and contempt for every thing on the face of the earth except himself.

Amongst all the objects of his detestation, Hollis had become to him the most odious. He could not endure the sight of him, yet he did not know how to part with him. The consequence was, that the menial, feeling conscious of his master's divided power and inclination, became rather his opponent in discussion, than his subordinate in execution ; and in short the house, neglected in all its ornamental parts, deserted by every body who could adorn or dignify it, became little less than a rendezvous for all the neighbouring sportsmen, without regard either to rank or character. Whether Harbottle were there or not, in or out, visible or invisible, the same continual routine of jest and ribaldry went on, until at last the Squire became severely ill ; and Hollis, in order to rid himself and his fellows of the trouble of waiting on a crowd of their equals, declared his master to be dangerously indisposed, and announced a discontinuance, at least for the present, of the unlimited licentiousness which had been for many days going on. The combined avowal of the Squire's illness, and the absence of "the meat and drink," answered the purpose effectually ; and the next day Binford Hall was as dark and as decent as Mopeham House.

What might have been the imprecations bestowed by the Squire upon the head of Hollis, for the "bulletin" which he had thought proper to issue without authority, had he been well enough to rise the next day, it is impossible to guess. The truth is, that Mr. Harbottle was really and truly too seriously indisposed to quit his bed ; and Hollis, having administered all the usual remedies upon such occasions, and finding his "poor master" slower in recovering than usual, deemed it necessary to send for Mr. Popjoy to visit the Hall : this measure he took about five o'clock in the afternoon ; the necessity for which, in his own mind, may be calculated by the fact, that as soon as it was dark,

the tilted cart belonging to the establishment was seen leaving the park-gates richly stored with well-piled hampers, (whether full or not, it does not become the historian to surmise), together with divers and sundry other articles "unknown to deponent," all of which were safely deposited in the London waggon the same night, and despatched at the rate of three miles an hour to the metropolis, directed to the exemplary son of the worthy house-steward and butler, whose departure for town has previously been noticed by Miss Mary Green.

The call upon Popjoy to visit the Squire came very opportunely ; for according to the arrangement of the Binford post, it would just give him an opportunity, in his reply to the letter which we happen to know he had received from Lady Frances, to convey to her ladyship some intelligence with respect to his patient's health ; and, as has been observed in an earlier page, nothing is so delightful to a correspondent from a dull place as a bit of something local, which may, for a moment, excite or interest a friend.

Upon the apothecary's return from the Hall, he therefore concluded his epistle to her ladyship ; and his red-and-white young gentleman having made a proper admixture of camphorated alcohol and aqua pura, according to her ladyship's directions, the bottles were packed and the letter sealed, into which we shall take leave, *en passant*, to peep.

"Binford, Oct. 13. 1830.

"My Lady,

"I have had the honour to receive your ladyship's letter of the 10th, and have made up three pint bottles of the camphor julep, such as I had the pleasure to furnish your ladyship with at Dale Cottage, and hope the same will be found to answer accordingly. I have much to thank your ladyship, for your ladyship's kind recollection of Mrs. P. She begs to be remembered to her ladyship, as does my daughter, to whom we did not venture to exhibit your ladyship's letter for fear of turning her poor little head.

"I am sorry to say that I have been sent for to-day to Mr. Harbottle, who is in a very bad way I fear : he is in a violent fever, and in some degree delirious, the effects of

constant intoxication, under which, I am told by the servants, he has been labouring now for two or three days incessantly. I have not ventured to bleed him in his present state of unconsciousness, because I am no advocate for phlebotomy, but I shall see him again this evening, and if he is not better, shall certainly call in Dr. Bogie, who is our nearest physician.

"Mr. Lovell is pretty well in health. Miss Emma has returned home; and they have a young French nobleman staying with them, Count Alexis Montenay, who seems a very particular favourite with Miss Lovell and her father. He stops, I hear, until Christmas. He is, however, a great resource to Miss Lovell, whose constant companion he is; for I am sorry to say, since her journey with Mrs. Harbottle, at the time of her elopement, the *ladies* here are not quite so attentive to her as they ought to be.

"I hope your ladyship will forward me any further commands, and I shall always be too proud to obey them on the instant. Your servants here are in good health, except the housemaid, Mary Green, who had a smartish bilious attack on the 30th of last month, but which discipline and abstinence soon set to rights.

"I have the honour, my Lady,
"to remain your Ladyship's
"most obedient,
"faithful,
"OLINTHUS POPJOY."

By the perusal of this letter — how acceptable to Lady Frances, who can describe? — we are put into possession of several interesting facts relative to the internal economy of Binford, the state of the Squire's health, and of the popular opinion of the elderly ladies with regard to Emma's flight, the apothecary's surmises about the French count; and, above all, the indigestion of Mary Green, on the morning after the day when, like Queen Elizabeth, she had eaten goose, and thought of her sweetheart.

Who can doubt the efficacy of this double-edged sword in the hands of Lady Frances against the suffering martyr, Emma? Not only the view that Lady Frances had taken

of her journey, but the view that all the old ladies took of it — not only the innuendo of a French count, but the actual fact of his residence at the Parsonage, and his name, Alexis Montenay — and all this, and the bulletin from the Hall, for the value of a little condescension, and three pints of camphor julep.

The effects of this communication remain to be exhibited in the sequel ; suffice it to say, that the letter, carefully sealed and delicately deposited in the packing-case, in company with the three bottles, quitted Binford at eight o'clock in the evening, and at half-past eight the gentle apothecary again proceeded to the Squire's bed-side, where he seated himself, and remained unnoticed by his much-damaged patient, until ten minutes past nine ; when, opening his eyes, the sick man swore a tremendous oath at the village Galen, and having thrown one of the pillows at his head, turned himself round again to sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

My bane and antidote are both before me.

ADDISON.

"EXACTLY the reverse, my lady," said MacGopus, who had arrived at Severnstroke just in time for dinner, and was now sitting after it, in the yellow drawing-room, debating a question with the Duchess and her daughter ; Lord Weybridge being occupied in a distant corner writing letters.

"Surely, my dear sir," said the Duchess, "you must agree with Catherine that equal matches are more likely to produce happiness than those in which there exists a great disparity of rank and fortune between the husband and wife."

"Quite the contrary, my lady," replied the Doctor. "If a rich man marry a poor woman, she feels grateful as well as affectionate, and *vice versa*."

" Well, now," said Lady Catherine — who being extremely amused by the quaintness and oddity of the Doctor's manner, determined to have her full share of the conversation — " when we were at St. Leonard's last year — "

" Stop, my lady," interrupted MacGopus — " where's St. Leonard's ? "

" Oh, the sea watering-place, close to Hastings," said her ladyship — " when — "

" Stay now — I beg pardon," said the Doctor, — " that must be near the spot where William the Conqueror landed."

" Exactly. Well, when we were at St. Leonard's last season — "

" Was it full, my lady, when you were there ?" asked MacGopus.

Lady Catherine, unused to such strange interruptions, stopped for an instant — and then looked at her mother.

" Why don't you answer, Catherine ?" said her grace.

" Oh," cried Lord Weybridge, from his corner, " Lady Catherine is not used to my old doctor yet. You wo'n't get him out of St. Leonard's this side midnight, if you indulge him."

" Mind your letter, my lord," said MacGopus. " Leave her ladyship alone. Well, my lady — "

" Upon my word I have entirely forgotten what I was going to say," said her ladyship.

" Something illustrative of the question concerning unequal marriages," said the Doctor, " which was to refute my decision."

What the anecdote illustrative of the question concerning unequal marriages might have been, the assembled party were not at that period destined to hear ; for Lady Frances, who quitted the room a short time before, on a summons brought to her by a servant, returned full of exulting smiles, and, with an expression of triumph on her countenance, threw the newly received letter of Popjoy (in the reading of which we have taken the liberty of anticipating her) upon the table before George, with an air of decision and

self-gratulation, which it would be vain to attempt to describe.

George ran his eyes along the lines, and Lady Frances watched the expression of his countenance as they followed the words of the Binford apothecary. A smile played on his lips at one moment, and then he paused. — “ I am sorry to hear of Harbottle’s illness,” said his lordship ; “ it is a result which one might have anticipated. He might probably have been saved, if your communicative correspondent had been able to bleed him at the moment.”

“ Well — read on,” said Lady Frances.

Lord Weybridge obeyed. He came to the paragraph about the Lovells — his colour changed — his lip quivered — symptoms which would have been most unpleasant to her ladyship, had she not felt assured that the intelligence which followed would cure the disorder altogether. George concluded so much of the epistle as concerned the family ; and, throwing it upon the table with an air of indifference and firmness, said — “ What a scandalous place a country town is. I think these old women, affecting to look shy upon a girl for conduct sanctioned by her father, and that father such a man as Lovell, is rather too much of a joke.”

“ What do you think of the history of the Count ? ” said Lady Frances.

“ Why, that he is some old friend of Lovell’s on a visit to the Parsonage, to whom Emma, in the plenitude of her good nature and good breeding, thinks it right to be extremely civil.”

“ Surely,” said Lady Frances, “ my dear George, you have not read the letter attentively. The words are ‘ young French nobleman.’ ”

“ Ay, ay,” said Lord Weybridge, who was determined not to be annoyed — “ but estimates of age are always comparative. Popjoy, at sixty, fancies any thing at fifty juvenile, just as a veteran of eighty laments the untimely death of his friend, at ninety-two, as an awful and unseasonable visitation. Duchess, do you, amongst the cloud of foreigners who migrate hither in the season like herrings and woodcocks, know any thing of a Count — what do you call him, Lady Frances ? ”

"Alexis Montenay," said or rather read her ladyship.

"Montenay?" said her grace — "No. What was that man's name with the mustachios we met at the Howards, Catherine!"

"I quite forget," said Lady Catherine, "but certainly not Montenay; and yet I do think I have heard the name. If you are very much interested, Lord Weybridge, I will write to-morrow to Lady Winterbourne, who has a list of the arrivals regularly furnished from the Foreign Office, and keeps a register of their names, in order to have them for lions at her parties during the season."

"Oh, I don't think," said Lady Frances, "George cares much about it."

"I think he does," said MacGopus, taking a pinch of snuff, and looking excessively cunning; for doing which Lady Frances could have killed him.

"Where did you hear of this 'outlandish person?'" said Lady Catherine.

"From Binford," replied Lady Frances.

"What's Binford, my lady?" said MacGopus.

"Don't answer him, my dear mother," said Lord Weybridge. "He knows as well as you do. I have told him at least a hundred times, and it is all affectation. He has heard that the majority of clever people in the world are short-sighted, and so he fancies that a short memory is a proof of great wit."

"I only asked what Binford was," said MacGopus, neither disturbed by his noble friend's raillery, or diverted from his purpose.

"Why," said Lady Catherine, "it is the place where Lady Frances lives when she is at home."

"Ah!" said MacGopus, "that's the place where the parson lives who has the daughter."

"Have you ever seen the Parson's Daughter?" said the Duchess.

"No, ma'am," replied MacGopus; "but I have heard a great deal about her."

"I think you will not hear much more," said Lady Frances, who looked at the Doctor as if she could have eaten him alive.

"I really don't see," said Lord Weybridge, "why Miss Lovell is to be an interdicted subject. She has shown her independence by accompanying a lady in her flight from a husband, and is now exercising her taste by flirting with a young French nobleman; whereupon the elderly ladies of Binford, to whose taste and judgment my dear mother was not always in the habit of deferring when they were her neighbours, think it prudent and wise to look cool upon her."

"And with good reason, too," said MacGopus; "why did she go scampering over the country with a runaway?"

"Ah, why indeed?" said Lady Frances, who was convinced she had got the Doctor in the right key to serve her purpose — "what excuse can be made for that?"

"Friendship, my lady," replied MacGopus, "which is an excuse for many things. She has got a father, hasn't she?"

"She has," said George, arousing himself to make the answer, from a reverie, the appearance of which was any thing but agreeable to his lady-mother.

"Well then, surely," said MacGopus, "if he — a good man — and a prudent man — and a wise man — permitted his child to make the excursion, there can't be much harm in it."

Here Lady Frances, who was dying to change the conversation which she had herself somewhat incautiously started, proposed music, *écarté*, chess, and fifty minor diversions; and Lady Catherine good-naturedly seated herself at the piano-forte, and played some of the last new quadrilles; but George, instead of following her to the instrument, as usual, took MacGopus aside, and muttered to him in one of the windows of the next drawing-room; and Lady Frances went and sat by the Duchess, to endeavour to talk down the unfortunate allusion which had been made to Emma; during which conversation, Lady Catherine blundered over Auber, unconscious of what she was about, and full of the belief that she was not so near the heart or coronet of their noble host as she had, during the last week, fancied herself.

It was just at this period — perhaps at the very moment

of which we are now treating—that the two mothers began to take counsel, and agree that the crisis had arrived—that the particular turn in the affair upon which both their hearts were fixed was at hand—and that it became a duty on the part of the Duchess to come to some explanation with Lord Weybridge on the subject of his intentions towards her daughter. This feeling on the part of her grace, Lady Frances endeavoured by every means in her power to strengthen. She was assured, by her son's manner, that his interest in Emma Lovell was in no degree decreased; but she was equally convinced, judging by the same criterion, that his faith in her was shaken. Her conduct subsequent to the very unsatisfactory letter of her father, in which he had evidently condescended to equivocate, was any thing but gratifying; and now this account of her new attachment, or flirtation, or whatever it was, coupled with the description of the impression which her imprudence had made in the immediate neighbourhood, her ladyship was perfectly convinced would prove a powerful blow to his personal vanity, or perhaps, as it might be considered, to his pride and delicacy.

Feeling conscious, as he did, that he had, in fact, and to all intents and purposes, made Emma an offer of his heart and hand through the medium of her friend—who, under all the circumstances, could neither have concealed nor misrepresented the fact—he certainly was staggered by the intelligence which his mother had received. Matter of opinion would have had little or no effect upon him; because he felt himself competent, upon an explanation of all that had occurred since his departure from Binford, to make up his own mind, and come to a decision upon Emma's conduct: but matter of fact he could not combat.

He certainly could not have expected any communication from Miss Lovell herself. He was not so certain as to the impracticability of Mrs. Harbottle's writing to him to announce the fulfilment of her engagement to plead his cause with her friend. There was no reason, considering the terms upon which they had been living, and considering the nature of the mission she had undertaken, why she should not have done so; and yet, on the other hand, the

sudden separation from her husband having taken place since she had seen Lord Weybridge, a difficulty and delicacy, either as to observing a total silence upon that point, or making any reference to it, might have restrained her from opening any thing like a correspondence with an unmarried man, whom she had known only under her husband's roof as his friend and acquaintance. Her silence, however mortifying, he could therefore account for; but he could not account for the display made by Emma of a new acquaintance domesticated at the Parsonage House, so immediately upon her return from the society of the friend to whose care the suit of her once evidently-favoured suitor had been entrusted.

These things were passing in his mind, and more than once during the evening he recurred to the name of Montenay with an interest and anxiety not to be mistaken. This night, therefore, Lady Frances resolved to press upon him the necessity of making some declaration with respect to Lady Catherine, and to tell him, *in confidence*, that by so doing in the morning, he would only anticipate a conversation upon the subject, which the Duchess felt it her duty to have with him the next day; and that by thus forerunning her grace's intentions, he would secure to himself the credit of a voluntary declaration, rather than the stigma of a forced explanation of his intentions.

Lady Catherine retired to rest early. She had — at least she said so — a head-ache, and she looked languid and pathetic, and her affectionate mother thought sleep, if she could get any, would do her good; and her ladyship quitted the drawing-room evidently out of spirits, and not without a somewhat reproachful glance at Lord Weybridge, who had never gone near her, or even spoken to her, since the perusal of his lady-mother's apothecary's letter.

Far be it from me even to surmise that the Duchess and Lady Frances had entered into any preconcerted arrangement for the purpose of leaving the family trio — for the Doctor, so far as its politics went, might fairly be considered one of the family — to a consultation upon matters of importance — but certain it is, that her grace was not long in following the example of retiring, which her

daughter had set her, at least an hour and a half before her accustomed hour. The Duchess departed, with a significant nod to Lady Frances, given with an expression of countenance which seemed to say—“I wish you would settle it to-night, it will save us a world of difficulty and embarrassment;” nor did her grace omit to take leave, in the most friendly way, of the Doctor, whose opinion she felt would have great weight in the cabinet; nor to wish Lord Weybridge good night, with one of her sweetest smiles, and a pressure of the hand, which he felt at the moment was ominously maternal.

“Strangers having withdrawn,” George, who knew—and, to a certain degree, habitually participated in—his excellent friend’s partiality for one glass of grog, at least, before turning in, and who was ordinarily supported in the pursuit by Lady Frances’s already mentioned bottle of soda-water, ordered all the essentials for such enjoyments, which, to the unaccustomed servants—who, till the Doctor’s arrival, had not been in the habit of serving refreshments so purely nautical—seemed “passing strange;” being much encouraged therein by his noble mother, who wished to make what the Scotch courts call a “*sederunt*,” in order at once to conclude the matter, which she considered of such vital importance to her own happiness and her son’s respectability.

“Now, George,” said her ladyship, “now that we are here—three—youself—your mother—and your faithful and favourite friend—what season can be better for the discussion of a topic which must inevitably be forced upon you to-morrow?”

“What topic may that be?” said Lord Weybridge.

“Why,” said her ladyship, “I will be candid—and I throw myself entirely upon Dr. MacGopus’s judgment to decide whether I am right or wrong. The fact is, that your attentions to Lady Catherine Hargrave have become so marked and so pointed, and her reception of them so decidedly favourable, that you are bound to take some decisive step immediately with regard to her. Remember now, I tell you, that in what I am saying, as your mother,

this evening, I believe myself only to be anticipating what her mother will say to you to-morrow."

"My dear madam," said George, "I am not conscious that my attentions have been particular:—I admit, I think that Lady Catherine is extremely agreeable, and handsome, and all that, and —"

"And you have taught her to believe in your good opinion, George," said her ladyship: "the effect that conviction has had upon her is evident to-night. Did you ever see such an alteration in her manner, in her appearance, even in her countenance, when she saw the interest you took about that French lover of the little dowdy Parson's Daughter?"

"Umph!" said MacGopus, "that goes for nothing—the grape ice the young woman ate after dinner disagreed with her. I knew she would be ill in the evening—that was all stomach—nothing to do with heart."

"Heart or not," said Lord Weybridge, "I certainly should be extremely sorry that any conduct of mine should have led either Catherine or her mother to anticipate a proposal on my part, which I certainly had not three weeks since the slightest idea of making. I confess candidly to you both, that if I could believe the history of Miss Lovell's frivolity —"

"Stay, George—stay, my lord," said MacGopus; "who's Miss Lovell?"

"Psha!" said Lord Weybridge—"don't worry me to death."

"How should *I* know," said MacGopus.

"Why, because you have been told a thousand times," said Lord Weybridge:—"I say, *if* I could believe first in the indelicacy of Miss Lovell's conduct with regard to Mrs. Harbottle —"

"Upon which," interrupted Lady Frances, "you never can possibly form a judgment, till you know Mrs. Harbottle's motives for eloping from her husband."

"And which motives," said Lord Weybridge, "from all I have heard from a friend of mine, I honestly admit I most seriously suspect."

"Well then, why doubt?" said his mother.

"Because it is impossible not to doubt."

"Then you do doubt," said MacGopus, "and isn't that enough?"

"What damned minutes counts he o'er,
Who doats, yet doubts, suspects, yet fondly loves."

"That's what I say, Doctor," said her ladyship, much encouraged by MacGopus's advocacy; "Cæsar's wife should not be suspected."

"I don't see how that applies, my lady," said MacGopus—"Lord Weybridge is never likely to be a Cæsar, and he has no wife."

"I mean, sir," said her ladyship, rather angry, "that a doubt of that young woman's propriety ought to satisfy him."

"Quite the contrary, my lady," replied the Doctor; "nobody can be satisfied with a doubt, because if you are satisfied, no doubt remains."

"Don't quarrel about terms or play upon words," said Lord Weybridge: "I agree with my mother, that the conduct of Miss Lovell is very strange, and I should say, if I had not a very high opinion of her character and disposition, that she seems to have been playing a reckless game; that from some unaccountable motive she had plunged into a new sphere of action, and rather gloried in her singularity."

"Is she handsome?" said the Doctor, sipping a glass of mahogany-coloured brandy and water, such as he was wo'n't to make and circulate on board of his Majesty's ship Elephant; for although one of the strictest observants of duty, and in himself one of the most rigidly correct and sober officers in the service, his skill in compounding and dispensing grog to his messmates in the wardroom, in a lawful and reasonable degree, was proverbial.

"I have told you a hundred times — beautiful," said his lordship.

"Beautiful! my dear child," said Lady Frances: "I'll tell you, Doctor, she has very handsome blue eyes, well-formed features, a fair complexion, light hair, and a very pretty figure."

"Umph!" said MacGopus, his huge black eyes rolling

about in their orbits ; "I don't consider that ugly — and they call her Emma ?"

"Oh ! you know that," said Lord Weybridge impatiently.

"Well, and you see, Doctor MacGopus," said Lady Frances, "here is this young woman without family, fortune, connection, or as it seems conduct, on the one hand, who, if George really ever had any *penchant* for her while domesticated in that odious place, has set him at defiance, and evidently made her choice ; for, of course, her father, even if he were fool enough to allow her to be the companion of a married runaway, would not permit the constant attentions of a young man of rank like this Count —"

"Montenay," said Lord Weybridge.

"Montenay — to be received," continued her ladyship, "without a certainty of some serious and permanent result — there can be no question about *that*."

"I own your arguments are extremely plausible," said Lord Weybridge ; "but I have confessed to you, and to this old scarecrow over and over again, a devotion to this misrepresented, excellent creature."

"To me !" said the Doctor, "you never did — you made a confidence about the Bibi Saab at Calcutta, and the wine-man's black-eyed daughter at the Cape, and the beautiful blue eyed yam-stock at St. Helena ; but you never confided any thing to me about this Miss — whatever her name is. Tut, man — look at Lady Catherine — there is a lovely young body — blood, beauty, rank, and accomplishment !"

"Psha !" said George, half wavering.

"You are right, Doctor MacGopus," said Lady Frances ; "Lady Catherine would make an admirable wife for him."

"I'm not so sure o' that, my lady," said the Doctor : "those fine showy creatures about in the world don't always settle down like the quiet ones."

"No to be sure," interrupted George, — "the quiet ones for me."

"Why so ?" said MacGopus : "the quiet ones abroad

are the noisiest at home — a tall woman and proud, and a little woman and loud, is the proverb in my country."

" Then whom do you agree with ? " said Lady Frances.

" Not with your ladyship," said the Doctor.

" Nor with me," said George.

" Certainly not," replied MacGopus.

" Then you agree with neither of us," said Lady Frances.

" On the contrary with both of you," answered the Doctor.

" Illustrious humbug," said George. " I shall go to bed — I am sick of this unprofitable discussion about nothing."

" Excuse me, Lord Weybridge," said MacGopus ; " it is about a great deal — it is about whether you are to sacrifice your honour and propriety, and all your future prospects, to a visionary scheme of happiness with an obscure hugger-mugger Parson's Daughter, who has been scampering all over the country with a profligate woman, and comes home to her father's manse, or whatever you call the thing here, with a French dandy count, whose very name makes me sick."

" What, have *you* deserted me ? " said Lord Weybridge.

" No ; I am adhering to you and to your interest," said MacGopus. — " I am sure this young lady is attached to you — Lady Frances says you have made her believe you are attached to her — fie ! man — where are your manners ? you have lost them all by grubbing ashore so long."

To Lady Frances this familiarity, which was quite unaccountable, and would at any other time have been vastly irritating, was quite charming : the rough grating of the Doctor's rebuke, so unlike the soft melodious tone in which he had been addressing the " ladies " during the earlier part of the evening, sounded like music to her ears ; and she sat silent, partly from amazement, and partly because she found that if she ventured to agree with her eccentric coadjutor, he would instantly convert himself into her most violent antagonist.

" What have I done," said George, " to commit myself, as you call it, to Catherine ? I tell you now as I told you

before, I think her an extremely delightful person—I enjoy her society—I love to hear her sing, or speak—for the one she does sweetly, and the other agreeably—but I am not conscious of having paid her more attention than is inevitable in a country house, especially if that country house happens to be one's own."

"The Duchess feels it differently," said Lady Frances.

"Let me drink—drink and forget all this," said Lord Weybridge; "let me forget Emma Lovell and the infernal French count. Come, MacGopus, make me one of those tremendous north-westers, that when I was a youngster and sick in love you prescribed for me on board the Elephant. I could have overlooked all the elopement story—but that infernal revolutionary——"

"*Ay de mi,*" said the Doctor, "what a whirligig your head is! so now, because the poor body has taken a walk with one of the French 'noblesse,' you are to cast her off—and—well, well—here drown your sorrows."

"Sorrows! he ought to have none to drown," said Lady Frances.

"No," said MacGopus, taking an extra pinch of snuff, "all his sorrows were drowned, four months ago, in the Mediterranean."

Lady Frances was shocked at this unfeeling allusion.

"To be sure," said the Doctor, glancing off entirely from the point to which she was endeavouring to keep her son, "that must have been a most lubberly business; but, no matter—the Royal Yacht Club in the Mediterranean—a cat in——"

"Come, come," said Lord Weybridge, "still your satire, most excellent Caliban! I wish I knew what I have done to deserve being called to account about Lady Catherine Hargrave."

"Nothing, dear George," said Lady Frances, "nothing; only followed the dictates of judgment and good taste. You saw and admired her—constant association has confirmed your first impression, and she is destined to make you happy."

"Me happy!" said Lord Weybridge, upon whose unaccustomed head the potential mixture of his nautical

Mentor began to take considerable effect : " Me ! — why, my dear mother, you fancy every woman who sees me is in love with me, I believe. Suppose — suppose, I say, at this very moment — oh ! that French monster, how I hate the recollection. Well — well — it is all her own fault ; — I say if at this very moment I were to propose to Lady Catherine, I would stake my existence she would refuse me."

" Commission me, George, to make the experiment," said Lady Frances, " this very night — for the Duchess is not gone to bed — this very hour I will satisfy you on that point. Come, George."

" Do, George," said the Doctor, because he was convinced he would not.

" I will do what is right," said Lord Weybridge, worked up into a state of excitement very nearly bordering on delirium : " you may tell the Duchess, if you like, that I admire her daughter, and that if she thinks I have evinced more attention towards her than a man without intention has a right to do — I — I — shall be delighted to marry her."

" You commission me to say this," said Lady Frances, " and permit me to put it in my own way — softening down the expressions, and modifying the language."

" Any thing for a quiet life," said Lord Weybridge, who was at the moment in a state to require quiet more than any thing else.

" Now recollect, George," said Lady Frances, " before I go, the commission is a serious one — it decides your fate."

" I consider my fate decided already," said George ; " I have been duped — deceived — cheated and despised ; there are no such things as innocence, and virtue, and sincerity in the world."

" Very little of any of them, indeed," said the Doctor.

" I tell you honestly," continued George, " I am careless and reckless : I believe marriage the best chance of happiness — not the happiness I once hoped for, but — there — there," said he, starting up, " do what you please — there's a *carte blanche*."

"And a Dame Blanche into the bargain," said the Doctor: "go to bed, my lord—go to bed; take my advice, and think of this again in the morning."

"There can be no occasion for that," said Lady Frances: "the management of the affair is now in my hands—isn't it, my dear George?"

"E'en as you please," said Lord Weybridge, scarcely knowing what he said, and not considerably indebted to his nautical friend for any thing like an explanation.

"Then I'll leave you to finish your evening," said Lady Frances. "Good night! Heaven bless you, dear George!" here she kissed his cheek. "Good night, Doctor—tomorrow we will resume the subject."

"I'll talk it over with you all day, my lady," said MacGopus, "good night!"

And so departed Lady Frances, and straightway proceeded to the Duchess's dressing-room, where she found Lady Catherine so much recovered as to have got up to drink some tea, which she fancied she should like, and the Duchess herself sipping the same beverage, just *pour passer le tems*. In this little committee all that had occurred below stairs was detailed by her ladyship, with such additions and new colourings as she thought might make it more amiable and acceptable to Lady Catherine, who bore the announcement of Lord Weybridge's intention with as much philosophy as "strong affection" could exhibit. After which Lady Frances took leave of her grace and her future daughter-in-law, in the best possible spirits at having attained her object, and brought matters to a point from which it appeared impossible for her son now to recede.

"Why, what a tom-noddy you have made of yourself!" said MacGopus to his noble friend, after Lady Frances had left the yellow drawing-room, "that is, if you care for the Parson's Daughter."

"What do you mean?" said George.

"Mean? why you have made an offer to Lady Catherine — you are aware of that, I suppose?"

"Not exactly an offer."

"Yes, exactly an offer—you have said you'll marry her. I should be sorry to trust myself to say so much to

any woman in the world, if I didn't mean her to accept me."

" Well done, Venerable Vanity," said Lord Weybridge ; " I am distracted—I dare say I have talked nonsense ; but why should I not marry her ?"

" I'm sure I don't know," said the Doctor, " only you told me that you were devoted—as you called it—to this unsophisticated creature at that place—the Parson's Daughter—and in two hours after you commission your mother to negotiate a marriage in another quarter."

" Stuff," said Lord Weybridge ; " she will negotiate no marriage—it will all end in talk."

" Not a bit of it," said the Doctor.

" *Nous verrons*," said his lordship ; " I would give the world to see this Count Montenay."

" It's all too late, I tell you," said MacGopus ; " your fate is settled—so count or no count—true or false—all's one to you, my lord ; come, let us to bed"; you'll have a head-ache in the morning."

" A heart-ache, perhaps," said Lord Weybridge.

" That's your affair," replied the Doctor ; " we shall see, as you say."

" But if you thought I was committing myself," said Lord Weybridge, " why did not you stop me—check me ?"

" What have I to do with it ?" said MacGopus, " I am only a passenger. You told *me* one story, and I believed you ; you told your mother another, and *she* believed you. She has a stronger claim upon you than I have, so I suppose you told *her* the truth. What had I to do with it ? As for Lady Catherine, if what you told me be true, I would rather marry the Parson's Daughter with a penny portion, than I would tie myself to this one with a million."

" Then why the devil did not you say so ?"

" If I had said so, you would have contradicted me, and I hate contradiction."

" You are a most unaccountable animal, to be sure."

" Come, my lord, to bed—to bed," said the Doctor ; " to-morrow may bring us something new ; but if you have not the whole bevy of beauties, dowager, duchess,

daughter, and all on your hands, before twelve o'clock, I'm a Dutchman."

" And whatever misery happens to me in consequence — "

" Say it was *me*, my lord," said the Doctor : " good night — you 'll be better after a sleep. Don't be angry with me — I dare say it will all come right in the end ; so — say good night."

" Well then, good night," said Lord Weybridge — and so they parted.

CHAPTER XV.

Had you a friend so desperately sick —
That all physicians had forsook his cure,
All scorch'd without and all parch'd up within ;
The moisture that maintain'd consuming nature
Lick'd up, and in a fever fried away ;
Could you behold him beg with dying eyes
A glass of water, and refuse it him
Because you knew it ill for his disease,
When he would die without it ? How could you
Deny to make his death more easy to him ?

DRYDEN.

WHEN, after a feverish sleep, disturbed and interrupted by wild and uncomfortable dreams, Lord Weybridge awoke in the morning, his feelings were any thing but calm or satisfactory — his recollections were unpleasant, his anticipations distressing. It was clear that, under an irritation caused by the unequivocal description of Emma's inconstancy in the Binford letter, and the united and separate persuasions, irony, entreaty, and ridicule of his mother and his friend, he had empowered the former to pledge him to the Duchess with respect to her daughter.

As soon as he had partly dressed, his lordship despatched his man to MacGopus's room, to beg him to come to him directly. The Doctor, who had previously taken an hour's " quarter-deck walk " on the terrace, obeyed the summons, and Lord Weybridge dismissed his valet.

"Doctor," said George, "I believe I have made myself the most unhappy man in the King's dominions: in a fit of spleen, much aggravated by your infernal sneers, I have permitted myself to abandon the only woman in the world I ever cared for, and pledge myself to one, for whom, now the hour is come, I am sure I care nothing."

"The hour isn't come," said MacGopus; "it is gone. Your mother and the Duchess have been walking in the flower-garden for the last hour and a half."

"What made them so early?" said his lordship.

"They are not early," said the Doctor. "What made you so late?"

"Head-ache and fever—all owing to that odious brandy and water."

"Brandy and water, in moderation, is a very wholesome thing," said MacGopus — "I say nothing in favour of an excess."

"What am I to do?" said his lordship; "of course the conversation must take place after breakfast — am I really committed?"

"Nailed like a mole on a barn door," said the Doctor.

"Then I am ruined!"

"Psha! What's the matter? — isn't the young lady noble, and handsome, and accomplished?"

"Hang her accomplishments," said George; "to think I should have been provoked into such silly—such wicked conduct—pledged as I am to Emma."

"A man should never pledge himself," said MacGopus, "except at an election, and there it does not signify. Hustings pledges—as you will find when they become the fashion—go for nothing."

"And as for this French count," continued his lordship, "why should I be jealous of a French count?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said MacGopus: "I should think, running against an English baron, he can't have much chance."

"Why did not you say *that* last night?" said Lord Weybridge.

"It didn't occur to me," replied the Doctor—"at present

I tell you that's past ; you have authorised your mother to open the preliminaries with the Duchess, and she has lost no time in doing so. You are as fast in the noose as if you had just returned from church."

" By heavens," said George, " I shall not be able to endure their looks, their words, their remarks at breakfast."

" Lady Catherine wo'n't come down," said MacGopus.

" How may you know that ?"

" The Duchess," said the Doctor, " asked me to give her some advice about her head-aches and fever, and I recommended her lying in bed."

" In that I do thank you," said Lord Weybridge.

" So, therefore, I would advise you to prepare for breakfast as fast as you can, and come to your reflections afterwards."

Saying which, the uncommunicative doctor retired, and Lord Weybridge began the completion of his toilet.

We have read in an account of an execution, how the culprit bore up with surprising presence of mind, and how his firmness never forsook him, even when the attendants came to pinion his arms, nor even while the great finisher of the law fastened the fatal noose round his neck. The fortitude of such unhappy sufferers was emulated by his lordship during his preparations for the breakfast-room. He felt the noose already fastened, and, having been self-condemned, had not even the distant glimmering hope of a reprieve before his eyes — all his thoughts dwelt upon procrastination and delay ; and as he was quite certain that nothing could be said during breakfast itself, surrounded as they should be by servants, he resolved upon making a dash at the outset, and endeavour, if possible, to evade any thing like a *tête-à-tête* with any body during the rest of the day ; in order to achieve which object, he resolved never to part with MacGopus until dressing time for dinner. But the postponement was childish — it was like smelling to a bitter draught which was sure to be administered, and which he had himself proposed to swallow.

The remorse which his precipitancy on the previous night caused him was deeper than either his friend or his

mother, or certainly Lady Catherine, could have imagined; and he only relieved himself from the poignancy of his feelings by anathematising the Doctor in terms the least gentle that can well be imagined.

At breakfast, the gracious and complacent smile of the Duchess, which played over a countenance expressive of a deep and intimate interest in all his lordship's proceedings, was worse to him than the grin of a Gorgon. He saw precisely all that was passing in her mind, and he watched the interchange of looks between her grace and his mother; and it was with difficulty he restrained himself from bursting into an exclamation, at once renouncing all his promises and permissions of the preceding evening, concluding the display of his feelings by rushing out of the room, throwing himself into his travelling carriage, and starting for a tour.

The sinking sailor sometimes finds a plank, the engulfed miner hears the sound of help at hand, the benighted wanderer sees some friendly light to save him from perdition. Little did Lord Weybridge, when he sat down to breakfast, anticipate what would occur before he had concluded it, which not only should rescue him from the jeopardy in which he felt himself, but carry him, as fast as horses' feet could move, to the very spot of all others to which he was most anxious to go.

Scarcely had he finished his coffee, when his own man entered the breakfast-room, pale with alarm, and breathless with haste, bearing in his hand a letter, which he whispered his lord had that moment arrived by express. It came from Binford.

"Binford!" exclaimed Lady Frances; "what! is my cottage burnt down?"

"No," said Lord Weybridge: "hear this," and he read as follows: —

" Binford Hall, four o'clock, A. M.

" My Lord,

" At the desire of Mr. Harbottle, who, I regret to say, lies without hope of recovery, I write these few lines to request — to 'entreat and implore' are his own words —

that your lordship will not lose a moment, if it be possible, in coming to him. From myself I may add, that a few hours may render your journey needless. He has some most important communication to make to *you*, to whom, of all persons in the world, he says it ought, for many reasons, to be made. His fever and delirium are violent; and although I have little hope of his recovery, I have no hesitation in saying, that the gratification of his desire to see your lordship would, more than any thing, I believe, tend to compose his mind, and reduce the irritation under which he labours. Let me venture to entreat your immediate compliance with what I almost fear you may consider his dying wish.

“ I remain, my Lord,

“ Your Lordship's obedient servant,

“ W. GROVER.”

“ From Doctor Grover is the letter?” said Lady Frances. “ Well, now, what a shocking thing, George! What will you do, dear?”

“ Go this instant,” said Lord Weybridge.

“ Go!” said her ladyship.

“ Go!” exclaimed the Duchess.

“ To be sure, go,” said the Doctor.

“ What earthly use is your going?” said Lady Frances.

“ What was, or is, Mr. Harbottle to *you*, or *you* to him, that he should send express to see *you*, of all the people in the world?”

“ My dear mother,” said Lord Weybridge, “ your eloquence will all be vainly exerted upon this occasion. I have eaten of his bread, I have drank of his wine; his house has sheltered me, and his welcome has greeted me; he is ill — perhaps dying. His last desire is to see me; shall I refuse him?”

“ But such a man!” said Lady Frances.

“ Exactly such a man, my dear mother,” said Lord Weybridge, “ as you found it convenient or agreeable to visit; and who, although rude in manner, was kind after his nature.”

“ Yes, like a bear,” said her ladyship, who saw in this

unexpected expedition a most dangerous impediment to her manœuvrings.

" Well, like a bear, if you please," said George ; " but if ladies admire bears, they must abide by their taste. I repeat to you, he has been kind to me — I now may be of use to him ; and if on his death-bed, as the physician thinks it, he begs to see me — I go. Here," continued his lordship, " order four horses to the chariot directly ; and you, my gentle Mac, will be my companion on the journey."

" Dear, dear," said the Duchess, " what a very extraordinary circumstance."

" Most extraordinary," said Lady Frances, " to send for George, whose only attraction to his house, as I believe, was his pretty wife."

" It is to prove that Mrs. Harbottle was *not* my only attraction," said Lord Weybridge, " that I am going to the house where she is not."

" Oh ! I dare say they have made it all up again," said her ladyship ; " and this is some trick of hers to get you there."

" I think," said Lord Weybridge, " Mrs. Harbottle is too well aware of my feelings upon such matters to fancy me into her cicisbeo. Come, Doctor, bestir yourself — my *fidus Achates* — come."

" Are you really going ?" said the Doctor.

" Why, to be sure I am : have I not said it ? have I not ordered horses ? Come — come."

" Of course you will not stay," said Lady Frances.

" *Cela depend*," replied his lordship : " I shall stay to fulfil whatever duty I may consider it right to perform. I shall venture to establish myself at the cottage, with your ladyship's permission, and shall moreover introduce the Doctor to your snuggery, in the full and perfect confidence of his finding fault with every part of it."

Lady Frances, of course, smiled agreeably, and looked quite charmed at the idea ; but her heart ached, as any body might have known who knew her countenance, because in a moment she saw all that would follow. Harbottle might have lived for ages or died the week before, and it would have been a matter of perfect indifference to

her ; but she anticipated the meeting which must infallibly take place between the Lovells and her son ; she dreaded the effect of the interview ; she feared the plausibility with which the Parson's Daughter might explain *her* acquaintance with the Frenchman, and, perhaps, completely exonerate herself from any thing like impropriety in the journey with Mrs. Harbottle ; in short, if that terrible personage, who is said to make his appearance immediately after being talked of, had arrived at Severnstroke instead of the messenger from the sick squire, he could scarcely have been less welcome, or have created more dismay.

"Mind, my dear George, now do take care," said her ladyship, "if you *do* go to the cottage, pray see that your beds are well aired."

"That's of no consequence," said the Doctor ; "the prejudice against the danger of lying in damp sheets — except, indeed, to a printer — is all a vulgar error."

"My dear sir!" said her ladyship.

"Come, MacGopus," said Lord Weybridge, "let us have no discussions—I have a duty to perform, and the rapidity with which I perform it constitutes part of the duty itself. I shall return as soon as possible, and the sooner I go, in all probability, the sooner I shall be home again : meanwhile, my dear duchess, make yourselves as happy as you can — there are two or three people, I believe, expected to-day and to-morrow ; and to you, my dear mother, I trust their reception, with all due ardour and hospitality — and now, come along."

"Not one word for poor Catherine!" said the Duchess, "who will sincerely lament missing you, I know."

"Oh!" said Lord Weybridge, "present my kindest regards and remembrances ; we shall, however, meet again so soon — and I hate the formalities of leave-taking — come, come, let us prepare ourselves."

Saying which, he literally turned MacGopus out of the breakfast-room, and pushing every preparation with the greatest rapidity, was in a short time waiting for nothing but his servant and the carriage.

There remained two manœuvres to be performed, for which there was just sufficient time : — as soon as George

had quitted the breakfast-parlour, the Duchess hurried to Lady Catherine's room, she found her in her dressing-room, having breakfasted ; two small plates entirely empty, two egg-cups quite vacant, and only half a well-sized loaf remaining on the table, indicating that her ladyship's appetite had not suffered—herself dressed for the morning. Her the Duchess hurried down stairs, to take leave of George by surprise just as he should be stepping into the carriage — this was the manœuvre of the Duchess.

Two minutes before his lordship's foot was on the steps, Robert, Lady Frances's footman, made his appearance, evidently labouring under some embarrassment of a serious character : he suggested, that as my lord would go to Dale Cottage, his presence might perhaps be more useful as being better acquainted with the *locale* than any of his lordship's footmen, and that, perhaps, her ladyship, if Mr. Roberts had no objection, would allow him to go in the rumble, and —

" To be sure," said Lady Frances : " tell Roberts, that I think, if his lord likes it, you had better go — to be sure — very thoughtful, indeed, Robert."

Wide apart were the spheres in which moved the Duchess and the footman, but the influence of passion and policy was pretty equal in either. The Duchess roused her noble daughter, and Robert affected an interest in Lord Weybridge ; the one to carry the point of producing an interview, between his lordship and Lady Catherine, and the other to secure himself the pleasure of a brief association with Mary Green !

One might stop to moralise upon these graduated trickeries, but we have not time ; the horses were actually at the door, and his lordship, sensitively grateful for the particular attentions of the lovely Catherine and her disinterested parent, and perfectly alive to all the embarrassments and anxieties of his mother, having thrown himself into the carriage, followed by his travelling companion, Roberts, with Robert the footman, mounted the rumble ; and, the postboys giving the rein to their steeds, away went the noble baron and his nautical friend.

CHAPTER XVI.

— His eye-balls roll at death :
 Behold the ling'ring soul's convulsive strife,
 His thick short breath catches at parting life.

DRYDEN.

THE suddenness of all this proceeding, which was quite in accordance with Lord Weybridge's wishes, and far beyond his hopes, inasmuch as his extrication from the difficulty in which he was plunged gave the affair all the character of a dream. To MacGopus it made not the slightest difference, whether he were musing by his fire-side, reading his book, contradicting his friend, or scampering across a country at the rate of a dozen miles an hour ; he was equally immovable, imperturbable, and philosophical. They had proceeded three miles before either of them spoke.

" I think I'm out of *that*, Doctor ? " said his lordship, breaking silence.

" Out of what, my lord ? " said MacGopus.

" The scrape I got myself into last night."

" Not you," said the Doctor ; " you'll never get beyond the tether of your lady-mother's apron-string ; your fate is fixed."

" It seems something like an interposition of fortune in my favour," said Lord Weybridge, " that Harbottle should express this wonderfully strong desire to see me ; and still more curious is it, as it will afford me an opportunity of seeing Emma, and — ”

" You must not see her," said MacGopus ; " what would be the use of ripping up old wounds, and putting the poor girl into an agitation, exciting her hopes and flattering her vanity, when you have just put it out of your power to realise the promises you have made her ? "

" Do you mean to say," said Lord Weybridge, " that if I find her blameless in the affair of Mrs. Harbottle's elopement—and I cannot but believe that the desire of her husband to see me has its origin in his anxiety for her exculpation upon that point—I have any possible excuse

for flinching from the fulfilment of my promise made to her friend?"

"The French count!" said the Doctor, taking snuff, as usual.

"Hang the French count."

"Why didn't you think all these things over last night?" said MacGopus; "I'll tell you why—the Duchess's daughter has got hold of you, and she pleases you, and amuses you, and flatters your vanity, and you had thrown over this Parson's Daughter, and had forgotten her."

"I forget——?"

"Yes, you had," said the Doctor, "forgotten her so far, that if this strange thing had not happened, you would before now have been as firmly engaged to marry Lady Catherine as you were engaged to marry the other, two months ago. Now that circumstances have roused your mind from the repose which it has been enjoying in society to which you have become habituated, with people whose whole aim and object are to make themselves agreeable to you—you return to your senses, and every hour as you approach the scene of what you once thought happiness, you will find the recollection strengthen upon you; till at last, if you permit your feelings to get the better of you, you will go so far as to renew your offer to your first love, even although she has been the associate of a wanton wife and the willing listener to the professions of a foreign adventurer: you must not see her, George."

"You might as well prevent the needle pointing to the pole," said his lordship.

"That's a very odd simile," said the Doctor; "you may rely upon it, your pole, as you call it, is in another place."

"I most certainly will see Miss Lovell."

"You wo'n't."

"But my dear doctor, I tell you I will."

"We shall see."

Here Lord Weybridge had recourse to his long established method of avoiding any farther altercation with his positive friend. He said no more, but throwing himself into a corner of the carriage, with a half-uttered ex-

clamation of rage at the obstinacy of his companion, affected to sleep, MacGopus chuckling to himself at having effectually silenced his agitated companion.

This sort of discussion was occasionally renewed during the journey, which was pursued as rapidly as possible, and terminated at the door of Binford Hall, about ten o'clock at night.

When the carriage drew up, what a melancholy contrast did the appearance of things present to that which was last exhibited to George's sight! One faint light glimmered in the Hall, and one or two peals at the bell were rung before any one appeared to open the doors. The drawing-room, once the bright centre of a brilliant circle of apartments, stood open, but dark, and the night wind whistled along the once well warmed and brightly lighted passages.

Lord Weybridge had arranged that the Doctor should proceed with the carriage to the cottage, and urge by his presence the preparations for the night's accommodation, about which Mr. Roberts the valet, and Robert the footman, had directions forthwith to busy themselves. His lordship had, in the first instance, requested MacGopus to stay at the Hall; but he peremptorily refused, from a feeling that his appearance there might create some groundless jealousy on the part of the medical attendants, and have the air of intrusion, of which his pride and dignity could not for a moment endure the suspicion.

"How is your master?" said Lord Weybridge to the servant who appeared.

"As bad as bad can be, sir," replied the man: "the doctors think he can't live out the night."

"Tell Dr. Grover that I am here; but let him be told," said Lord Weybridge, "so that Mr. Harbottle may not hear it."

The servant ushered Lord Weybridge into the library, and proceeded to do his lordship's bidding. The library, like the rest of the house, exhibited all the melancholy marks of desertion and neglect. The cold stillness of the room, which erst had rung with laughter, struck upon George's heart; nor was this feeling unmixed with the

recollections of the society he had enjoyed here, and the indiscretions which he had somehow to atone for at home. Every object revived his affection for Emma, and convinced him, that however agreeable the dream in which he had been slumbering away his hours at Severnstroke, the moment of awakening had arrived, and all perhaps too late.

From his reverie Lord Weybridge was aroused by the entrance into the apartment of Dr. Grover, who, after having made his excuses for taking the liberty of writing so hastily and abruptly to request his lordship's attendance, told him that he believed his unhappy patient had but a few hours to live—the ease which he at present was enjoying he believed to be only a symptom of mortification ; and he felt happy that his lordship had so kindly and so speedily complied with Mr. Harbottle's anxious desire, as he evidently had something most important to disclose to him, and, as he had said over and over again, to him alone.

"Has Mrs. Harbottle been sent for?" asked Lord Weybridge.

"She has," replied the Doctor, "and will, I know, if possible, be here : her own state of health, Mr. Lovell, who is in Mr. Harbottle's room, has informed me, is so delicate, that caution was necessary in taking such a journey rapidly. However, it is a gratifying circumstance to know how anxiously her husband desires to see her."

"Mr. Lovell is here, you say," said Lord Weybridge.

"Yes, with the kindness and devotion to his duty and his friend, he has made an exertion beyond his strength, and has been conveyed hither—himself an invalid. Mr. Harbottle has appeared much more tranquil since his arrival ; indeed, he has scarcely left him for the last three days."

"And Miss Lovell ——" said his lordship.

"Is at the Rectory : in scenes like that to which you will soon be summoned, of course she could in no degree participate ; nor did we consider it prudent, under the circumstances of the case, to agitate her by more fre-

quent accounts of the progress of the inflammation than absolutely necessary. Her care and anxiety about her father, so unused as he is to quit his home, have been quite sufficient to keep her mind painfully employed ; and we have restricted Count Montenay — whom, of course, your lordship knows — to three visits here in the day, to carry her intelligence as to how matters are going on. However, to-night, I apprehend, will close the sad history, and poor Mr. Lovell may be restored to the calm retirement of his own peaceful dwelling."

"But Count Montenay," said Lord Weybridge, "is——"

"I beg your lordship's pardon for one moment," said Doctor Grover ; "some one calls me."

Saying which he went to the door of the room, and found the officious Popjoy, who had been sent by the patient to summon the Doctor, and to conjure Lord Weybridge, if he had arrived, to come to him instantly. He had heard the sound of wheels when the carriage drew up to the door, and, with an earnestness amounting almost to frenzy, entreated — implored — and at last insisted, that not a moment should be lost before he saw his friend, as he emphatically called his lordship.

To such a summons, under the sanction of Doctor Grover, there could be but one answer ; and George followed the medical man along the lobby, which led to what was in other times Harbottle's morning-room, but in which now stood his bed ; for, as has been already stated, he had never left the ground-floor of the house since Fanny's departure. The door was opened, and George entered. All was still — save a subdued moan uttered by the unhappy master of the mansion.

"Who's there ?" cried Harbottle, raising himself in bed. "You — you, George — George — you — Sheringham !"

"Be calm, my dear friend," said Grover.

"Be calm," repeated Lovell.

"Calm — I can't be calm — George — George !"

"I am here at your desire, Harbottle," said Lord Weybridge, at the same moment taking Lovell's hand affectionately as he passed to the bed-side.

"I see—I see!" cried Harbottle. "Now—now—there's no time to be lost; Doctor—Grover—all of you—go—go—leave us; you—you, Lovell, stay—go, all of you. I'll give ye a thousand pounds to go this minute—I've plenty of money still—go!"

Grover beckoned his colleague and the servant who was in attendance, and they retired.

"Are they gone?—is the door shut?—quite shut—close—close—close!"

"Yes," said Lord Weybridge; "but now let me entreat you to calm yourself."

"It's all over George; let me call you George—to-morrow I shall not be able to call you any thing—I'm dying—they know it—I know it—but I could not die in peace—in peace I cannot die even as it is."

"Be patient," said Lovell, "be calm."

"Oh! Sheringham, I have sent for you—to unburden my mind. You were my friend—I loved you—I esteemed you; you had a regard for my wife—my poor, poor ill-used wife! You loved Harvey—poor Harvey! you love Emma—Lovell's daughter—you do—you do—I know all that—I have my senses yet."

"Well, but, now?" said Lovell.

"I know—I know," said Harbottle, "I'm coming to it—I cannot buy time—or breath—I have none to spare. He knows the history—Lovell knows it all, George—but he would never have told it. It is to clear my wife—my Fanny—she I was once so fond—so proud of. She's coming, though—she's to be here, George—I shall see her yet;—give me some drink—I must speak it all yet—my tongue is parched."

"Why agitate yourself in this manner?" said George; "nobody doubts or suspects your wife, nobody—"

"Ay, that's it," said Harbottle, "but *I* did—that villain Hollis—he's gone—it was my last act—he's gone—last night, he went—villain.—But listen: I gave the cue to the world to suspect her; she left me—fled, and Lovell's pure, good daughter went with her—she is injured by it—she is doubted and suspected. He—this good, kind, kind man would never vindicate his child at

my expense. I must — hear me, George — you will consent to be one of the executors of my will — I have done this on purpose — my wife — my wife has every thing — all I can do to atone for my conduct. Oh! — jealousy — meanness — drunkenness — ”

Here again he fell back, exhausted. Loyell spoke to Lord Weybridge a few words.

“ No — no,” said Harbottle, “ I have strength left for that ; George — hear it — hear *me* — Harvey — how dare I pronounce his name — he was *my* friend — *your* friend — he — George, George — oh God — I am his murderer ! ”

“ Hush ! hush ! ” said Lovell.

“ No — hush ! let it be heard — let it be heard,” said Harbottle : “ Sheringham, I did not strike him to the earth — my hand was never stained with his blood ; but his blood is upon my soul — money — money cannot buy it off.”

“ You rave, Harbottle,” said Lord Weybridge.

“ No — no ; hear me — I recollect all the circumstances — it is fit you should hear them from my lips. I went to Bradfield’s to shoot — we were out ; while we were beating a cover, Harvey, who had ridden over from Mordaunt’s, joined us. You see I am not mad — I recollect all the circumstances. Nobody there knew of our differences — not even Harvey himself was aware of the strength of my feelings. He joined us — he spoke to me — I returned his salutation. We were for an hour near each other in the field. Ten times did I feel as if I should like to shoot him on the spot.”

“ Oh, for mercy’s sake ! ” said Lord Weybridge.

“ Ah, but it’s true, and I killed him at last,” said Harbottle, with a horrid smile : “ I did ! Listen — listen — hear me ; he was pressed to dine at Bradfield’s ; he assented — we dined ; we drank much wine — he saw my coldness of manner — I saw he did — there was some joke — some bet, I believe about drinking — and to rally, he drank more wine than ever I saw him drink, but not so much as I did ; yet I recollect all — the party broke up — we two were the only men going away — all the rest slept in the house. He had no servant — I had none.

Our horses were brought to the door together. Bradfield came out with us — we mounted and took leave of him together. Give me some drink, Lovell."

Lord Weybridge handed him some lemonade, which he sipped.

" We rode forward together, without speaking, for some minutes. He made an observation — I answered as I should have answered a stranger, and put my horse into a canter. He did the same — my blood was boiling — my head whirled — my heart was full of revenge, and I only cast about in my mind how to pick a quarrel with him which might have no reference to what I fancied my real grievance ; but I could not, in my confusion of ideas, hit upon any thing plausible, and we cantered on till we came to the corner by Broustead Gap. There it was he broke silence, by asking me if there was not a way across the common which led into the upper road by Mordaunt's. The thought — the devil, I should say, glanced into my mind at the moment ; the night was pitchy dark. — ' Yes,' said I, ' there — d' ye see yon light — ride straight for it, as straight as you can ride — that light is in the upper road.' — ' Good-night, Harbottle,' said Harvey ; I could not answer him — my tongue clove to my mouth. — They were the last words he ever spoke — I knew they would be, George ! He put spurs to his horse, and galloped off at my bidding. I knew what was to happen. I pulled up, and listened. — I sat in an agony of anxiety — my ears throbbed, and my heart beat — I heard the hoofs pattering on the turf — the sound grew fainter, but still I heard them going — it lasted but a minute, I heard a sharp cry, and then a crash — it was the headlong fall of both man and beast into a deep gravel pit, which I knew lay right in his path — there — there his mangled body was found the next morning."

Harbottle sank on his pillow for a moment — he raised himself.

" I hear the horrid clatter now — it was momentary — not a sound — not a groan followed — all was still — I rode home as hard as I could gallop — I fancied Harvey was behind me. I smelt his blood in my nostrils, and tasted

it in my throat. I came home—here in the room over this—I gloried in the work. I bragged of it to my wife—I did—I jeered her about Harvey, and gloried in being his murderer. She left me, George, as soon as the day dawned; was she wrong? This good, good, kind man's daughter, like a ministering angel, went with her to her aunt's. Oh! George! I shall never see her again. She wo'n't come—no—no—I know she wo'n't—I dare not pray for her—no—nor for myself—yet now you know the truth; you ought to know it. Curse me not! I am not mad now!—I was mad then—raving mad!—but Fanny is innocent!—and Emma, who has been traduced, is innocent; I alone am guilty."

"Can this be true?" said Lord Weybridge to Lovell.

"I have been till now the sole depositary of this dreadful secret," said Lovell; "no evidence could have substantiated the fact legally; he confessed it to his wife, and she quitting him immediately, gave me that account which he has just repeated, as the reason of her forming the sudden and immutable resolution never again to associate with him."

"What is it you are saying?" said Harbottle. "All you can say of my guilt, say—if it will anwer any end of justice, you have my consent to publish it all. Whatever is necessary to establish Fanny's character, let every body know; but, oh! she will not come to me, George. I would give ten—twenty thousand pounds, for one forgiving smile—one single kiss, such as she used to give me; but no—blood!—blood!—blood! She will not come near me!"

Here he seemed to faint from exhaustion, and Lord Weybridge thought it advisable to call Dr. Grover into the room. He came; Harbottle immediately recognised him.

"You are returned, Doctor," said he.

"I merely came to see if you wanted any thing," said Grover.

"No, no! nothing! I feel sleepy, Doctor; very sleepy."

"Indulge it, sir," said the physician.

"Ah! nothing will avail; it's all over!" said Harbottle. "So much the better! but I am easier! I am happier, Sheringham! — shake hands with me — bear with me — bear with a repentant sinner! You and Lovell will have all my affairs to arrange; forgive the trouble I impose: it will be useful to Fanny to have a man of your rank and character to support her — you will — I know you will — and Lovell — and his daughter. Oh! Lovell! — remember me kindly to your excellent child."

A flood of tears here relieved the unhappy man.

"Try and sleep, sir," said Grover; "lay your head on the pillow."

"I will, I will," said Harbottle. "I am sure I shall sleep! — but hear! — mind what I say — if Fanny comes — if it is one — two — three o'clock — any hour — don't mind my sleeping — wake me — wake me the moment she arrives. Bless her! bless her! — Now, don't forget! promise me *that*."

"Rely upon *me*," said Grover.

In a few minutes Harbottle, as he had anticipated, fell into a profound slumber.

He never woke again.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

VOLUME THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

Death is the lightest evil we should fear —
'T is certain, — 't is the consequence of life.
Th' important question is not when we die,
But how we die.

HAVARD.

THE dreadful scene which Lord Weybridge and Lovell had just witnessed had a powerful effect upon their feelings — to Lovell the intelligence conveyed in Harbottle's confession was of course not new ; upon the mind of George it acted doubly ; first, in exciting the most unqualified horror at the barbarity of the wretched culprit, and the bitterest grief for his lamented and unhappy friend Harvey ; and, secondly, in at once exonerating from all blame or imputation his beloved Emma, who now stood wholly and entirely acquitted of indiscretion or impropriety in sharing the sorrows and journey of her wretched friend, driven as she had been from the home of her husband by no fault, no failing of her own, but by the horror naturally created by his savage boast of being a murderer.

All the doubts which Lady Frances Sheringham had been labouring for weeks to instil into George's mind were scattered, dissipated, and obliterated, by this most unlooked-for discovery ; all the reflections which she had cast upon the selfish meanness and hypocritical piety of the good clergyman were exploded and overthrown ; and he felt anxious for the moment when he might throw himself at Miss Lovell's feet and implore her forgiveness, for having suffered himself to be duped into the belief of a possibility of her imprudence or her father's venality ; for to the latter base source Lady Frances affected to attribute the permission he had given his child to be the partner of Mrs. Harbottle's retreat.

At the suggestion of Dr. Grover, Mr. Lovell, who had not quitted the Hall for the last two days, agreed to return home, the Doctor giving it as his opinion that "all was over," but promising that if, contrary to his expectations, nature should rally, he would immediately send to the Rectory and to Dale Cottage ; to which, also, Lord Weybridge agreed to retire to wait the event which was hourly expected, or the alteration for the better, at which the Doctor so slightly glanced ; in fact, it was not until Harbottle himself was fully convinced he was past recovery, that he could prevail upon himself to make such a confession as that which they had just heard.

To some it may appear strange that he should have been induced under any circumstances to proclaim himself so great a culprit on his death-bed, but it should be recollect ed that Lovell was already apprized of the affair ; at least Mrs. Harbottle had confided to him so much that the subsequent admissions of her husband to him completed the horrid history ; and that *he*, being the sole depositary of the secret, and knowing how materially Mrs. Harbottle had been injured in popular opinion by the steps she had taken, and aware, of course, that a proportion of the blame and censure which attached to her devolved upon his poor innocent child, was most anxious that some less interested person than himself should also be admitted into Harbottle's confidence, at a period when the disclosure could only affect his memory, by which not only his exemplary widow would be restored to her place in society, but the mean and insidious calumnies of the coteries of Binford and their various centrifugal ramifications might be exploded and exposed. It was he, therefore, who, when he saw the disposition of Harbottle, as his illness increased, to apply to Lord Weybridge to accept the executorship of the will conjointly with himself, urged upon him the propriety and justice of exculpating with his own lips his unhappy and injured wife, thus enabling Lord Weybridge, whenever the occasion might offer, to vindicate her reputation and support her character ; and Harbottle was the more ready to agree to Lovell's proposition, from the certainty that Lady Frances would be, as, indeed, he had

heard she already had been, one of the first to asperse poor Fanny's reputation, and attribute her separation from her husband to the worst possible causes.

In pursuance of the physician's advice, Mr. Lovell proceeded, with assistance, to his pony chaise, in which — strange coincidence of circumstances, after their extraordinary separation — he was driven by Lord Weybridge to the Rectory, his lordship hardly knowing what the reverend gentleman was observing upon the merits of the case, or the horrors of the exhibition they had just witnessed, while his thoughts were fixed upon the possibility — the mere possibility — of his being in ten minutes more in the presence of the much injured Emma, having utterly forgotten that there existed such a being as Lady Catherine, or, what was even more terrible, any thing very like an engagement between them.

They reached the Rectory-gate. George drove in, and drew up at the door with Buxton-like dexterity.

"Is Miss Lovell gone to bed?" said the Rector to the servant.

"Yes, sir," replied the man; my young mistress went to bed about eleven, and the Count went to bed before that."

The Count! — "Ay, there's the rub." — George felt himself strangely agitated.

"I wo'n't ask you to come in, Lord Weybridge," said the Rector, "for I know you have a friend at the cottage: you'll take the chaise."

"Oh, no, no," said Lord Weybridge, "not I — I — would rather walk — I'm cold — or — indeed I prefer walking."

"If we should not be summoned in the course of the night," said Lovell, "we shall meet in the morning — perhaps your lordship will call here."

"Yes, yes," said Lord Weybridge — "yes, my dear sir — that I will — good night — good night — don't stay in the air."

"Good night," said the Rector.

"The devil take that Count!" said Lord Weybridge, before he had got out of the grounds. "So — all my

castles are down again.—What signifies her prudence with respect to Mrs. Harbottle if she cannot palliate her conduct with this infernal French fellow?—I might know all about him by asking any of the people around me, but I will not. I will not suffer myself to be prejudiced; he may be no lover, after all, and the scandal and absurdity of the neighbours might give a colouring to his acquaintance at the Parsonage which the real facts of the case do not in the least justify. No—I am resolved—I'll see the man—and if possible see him with Emma. I think I know enough of the world to form a judgment of the state of their intimacy by appearances, and after the disclosure of to-night, by which her conduct stands cleared to view, I will not permit myself to be swayed or governed by any thing short of ocular demonstration or *vivid voce* evidence.”

From himself and his own affairs his thoughts reverted to the wretched subject of his late contemplation, and the wreck of the happiness and respectability which, to the eye at least, appeared so firmly established at the Hall but a few weeks before. A thousand things occurred to his recollection which brought his murdered friend before him, while almost every incident with which he was connected involved his still beloved Emma in its developement. Full of clashing hopes and conflicting sentiments, the noble baron reached the cottage.

There he found MacGopus sitting over a blazing fire, reading with the deepest attention an odd volume of some book which happened to be lying upon the table when he came in, absorbed in its contents, and almost unconscious of his right honourable friend's arrival.

“Well, Doctor,” said his lordship, “I suppose your patience is nearly exhausted; we could not get away before.”

“Oh! said MacGopus, “your friend took more killing than the physician thought for—is he dead?”

“No,” said George, “but he has fallen asleep; and Dr. Grover is of opinion that it is his last.”

“Why should it be his last?” said MacGopus—“quite contrary.”

"That cannot be," said George, "for it is evidently not his first."

"Psha!" said MacGopus, "I didn't say it was his first. I say that after this sleep he may awake refreshed—you don't seem to have suffered much in your feelings if you can condescend to quibble."

"Why, what I have heard and seen are not calculated to create any great sorrow, or move much pity.—I drove Lovell home."

"Lovell—stop now," said the Doctor, "who's Lovell?"

"Oh!" cried Lord Weybridge, infuriated at the calm, placid, persevering enquiry about a man whose name he had heard five hundred times in the course of the day. "What nonsense—why, Mr. Lovell is the rector."

"Oh!—ay," said MacGopus, "well—how should I know?"

"Have they announced our supper?" said Lord Weybridge, "I am faint and weary—and, moreover, Harbottle's executor, which will detain me here some two or three days."

"You must not stop here," said MacGopus.

"I must."

"Your mother will go crazy, and the Duchess grow desperate."

"I must do my duty to my departed friend."

"He is not departed."

"Well, but he cannot linger long."

"Don't be too sure of that—if the Doctor leaves him to himself, the chances are that he will."

"What a satire upon your own profession!" said Lord Weybridge.

"I don't profess to be a physician," said MacGopus: "surgeon's work is all fair and aboveboard—a cut's a cut, and the thing speaks for itself. I hate physicians, they keep grubbing like moles in the dark. How should a clock-maker know what's the matter with a clock unless he looks at the works? I never regretted any thing so much in my life as not having pulled a physician's nose five-and-twenty years ago."

"And yet you would not go into Harbottle's house to see him?"

"Not I," said MacGopus; "I'm only a passenger, as I once told a cockney on board a ship that was foundering — it is no business of mine."

"You are a strange compound of materials," said Lord Weybridge; "when I have you here, I don't know what to do with you; and when I haven't, I don't know what to do without you."

"Come, ring for supper," said MacGopus, "I'm starving."

George, who had never entirely shaken off the awe with which MacGopus had inspired him, when he was a "young gentleman" in his Majesty's ship Elephant, under his special patronage, obeyed the surly-sounding mandate of his guest, and a few minutes placed them at table.

"There now, I am better," said the Doctor, having concluded his repast, and drawing his chair towards the fire; "now for a pinch of snuff, and a glass of grog, and then for a turn in."

"Well," said Lord Weybridge, "one thing has resulted from this unexpected application of Harbottle's, and I think you will be glad to hear it, Doctor. Emma's character and conduct stand completely fair and clear to view, and her suffering friend and companion is exonerated from every suspicion which envy or malice may have excited against her."

"Glad!" said MacGopus — "not I; on the contrary, I am particularly sorry — because, if this Parson's Daughter had been what your mother made you believe her to be, you would have treated her properly by casting her off, and engaging yourself anew; as it is, you will have the perpetual satisfaction through life of knowing that you have behaved most scandalously."

"Why," said George, "didn't you yourself join in running poor Emma down?"

"To be sure I did," replied the Doctor. "You chose to exalt her; I knew you must never marry her; and so,

as I saw a fair opening for a cut, I thought it no sin to take advantage of it."

" But now that these calumnies are falsified ——"

" You never can have Emma," said MacGopus.

" Never ?"

" No ; and therefore, as I have already said, you will live a life of wretchedness with your right honourable wife, and gratify the wishes of your mother's heart by breaking your own."

" What a pleasant picture !"

" It's one of your own painting, my lord.— And so Mrs. Harbottle's running away is justifiable."

" Perfectly — entirely."

" Upon what grounds ?"

" That I cannot — at all events yet — confide even to you."

" What ! I suppose her husband smoked tobacco — or eat onions — or drank too much wine — or did as he liked, without asking her leave — or objected to her flirting ? *Ay de mi*, it's a nice world we live in."

" Assure yourself that she had the most serious reasons for quitting him — reasons which, when known, will place her above the shafts of malice."

" Well, why not tell me what they are ?"

" Till Harbottle is dead, my lips are sealed."

" I should think, if your friend the physician is up there still, you may open them without injuring the patient."

" I am convinced, so will you be ; and being satisfied of the justice and propriety of her conduct, it naturally follows that Emma is equally blameless."

" Well, but, George," said MacGopus, " putting aside the elopement, and all that, how do you get over the French count — eh ?"

" Oh — hang the French count."

" As many as you please, with all my heart," said the Doctor, who hated a Frenchman as cordially as ever Nelson did. " But he is not dangling yet, my lord ?"

" I am afraid he is," muttered his lordship, who did not venture to quibble openly in the presence of his friend,

who could not endure — because, like the rest of his countrymen, he could not understand — a pun. It, however, must be confessed that the Count was yet a stumbling-block in the way of a perfect reconciliation between Lord Weybridge and Miss Lovell ; still the moment was not far distant, when he would boldly face the foe, and make such a reconnoisance in person as should satisfy his mind as to the force and intention of the enemy.

"Pray, are we to sit up here till your friend dies ?" said MacGopus, with one of his arch chuckles.

"No," replied his lordship ; "should that event occur, a message will be immediately sent here ; or should he linger on till the morning, we shall of course hear, and I shall again resume my post at his bed-side."

"Ugh ! — he wo'n't live till morning."

"Why, just now you said he would."

"What does that signify ? His own doctor says he wo'n't ; and these fashionable fellows, when once they have issued their *fiat*, generally back their opinion by their practice."

"My dear doctor," said Lord Weybridge, "you are more than usually bitter to-night."

"Not I," said MacGopus ; "on the contrary, I never was in a better temper. But I see that you are in a web — caught as securely as ever fly was, and that you will make yourself either —"

"Oh ! spare me, my dear Mentor !" interrupted his lordship. "Rely upon my prudence as a man — my spirit as a gentleman — and my honour as a peer — not to speak of my sincerity as a sailor."

"Your prudence you showed in first attaching yourself here," said MacGopus ; "your spirit I expect you will exhibit by horsewhipping the French count ; your honour you must vindicate by marrying Lady Catherine, and your sincerity you will exemplify by deserting the Parson's Daughter."

"As for the horsewhipping," said George, "I make no bargain ; but as for deserting the Parson's Daughter, as you call her, I —"

"Psha ! light your candle and go to bed," said Mae.

Gopus ; “ how can you help deserting her ? You have an oath — an oath at Severnstroke ; and, besides, you have a mother, and so has Lady Catherine. Come — come — you want rest.”

“ I do,” said Lord Weybridge ; “ but your conversation is not the soother which is likely to give it me. The return to this place awakens every recollection, and recalls every tender feeling of my heart ; and to think that I should have quietly abandoned all the happiness which is yet before me, if this singular turn of affairs had not brought me back to it — ”

“ A little too late, my good lord,” said the Doctor — “ I only warn you about your conduct to-morrow with this young lady. Commit yourself to *her*, and a pretty affair it will turn out altogether. Now recollect what you are about ; and above all — for *my* sake don’t spare the French count.”

It must be admitted that, however contradictory in terms, and however unpalatable in language, all that Mac Gopus said was perfectly and entirely true. No doubt Lady Frances had now completely arranged — not only in her own mind, but in consultation with the Duchess and her daughter — the marriage after her own heart, and was triumphing in her successful attack upon George at the most critical period of time. She knew him, and she felt secure that, after the permission he had given her to open the preliminaries to her friend, he would avoid Miss Lovell ; or, if he saw her, would at all events render his interview such as would at once terminate, if not her anxiety, at least her hopes ; more especially as he left her ladyship under the conviction that Emma’s conduct could not have been justifiable under any possible circumstances.

How all these things turned out, we shall see ; for the present we have little to do but to live in expectation of decisive news of the Squire, and wish Lord Weybridge and his eccentric friend a very good night, as they wished each other, on arriving at the head of the staircase which led to their bed-rooms.

CHAPTER II.

Where there 's a will, there 's a way. *Old Proverb.*

As the reader has anticipated Lord Weybridge in the intelligence which, in the morning, reached him of the death of the Squire, it will be needless to recur to that event farther than to mention that a note from Lovell summoned his lordship to the Hall at ten o'clock, for the purpose of arranging matters, and opening the will of the deceased, to which he had particularly directed the Rector's attention, and had indeed furnished him with the key of the escrutoire in which it was deposited.

Before, however, the hour of meeting arrived, a despatch had reached Mr. Lovell from Mrs. Harbottle, stating not only her readiness but her anxiety to comply with her husband's desire to see her, and lamenting that the delicate state of her health, still more shaken by the unexpected news of his rapidly approaching dissolution—prevented her putting her design into execution ; that she had been suffering under a nervous depression of spirits, and that the abruptness with which her aunt had communicated the intelligence which it had been intended she should impart to her with the greatest care and caution, had brought on a fever which confined her to her bed. The rest of her letter was such as might be expected from such a person ; conveying to her wretched husband entire forgiveness as far as she herself was concerned, and deplored a catastrophe which it was evident had been accelerated by his own reckless disregard of his health and his constitution, and which, however much justified she might feel herself in having quitted him, she could not but think might have been long delayed, had her influence — much ridiculed, yet deeply felt by him — been at hand to have checked his irregularities, and modified his intemperance.

To regret such a man — guilty of such crimes — and

a martyr to such passions — would scarcely be possible ; but in her gentle heart, shuddering as it did with horror at his premeditated cruelty, there still existed that unquenchable spirit of pity and compassion which a woman never ceases to feel for one with whom she has been linked by the strongest tie, next to those of nature, which mortals acknowledge. For his crimes, he was to answer before a higher tribunal ; for his occasional ill-treatment of herself, she pardoned him ; and her absence from his death-bed was really and truly, as she stated, the effect of illness she could not combat, and of feelings she could not overcome.

Before ten, Lord Weybridge was on his way to the Hall. MacGopus did not object to accompany him now ; for not only was the patient dead, but the Doctor gone. Dr. Grover had left a note for Lord Weybridge and Mr. Lovell with Popjoy, and had taken his departure almost immediately after the termination of the scene ; for being pressed greatly for time, in order to get back to London, he preferred leaving the apothecary in charge of the Hall until the executors should arrive ; and considered it best, as Mr. Lovell had had no rest for the two preceding nights, not to have the intelligence of Harbottle's death conveyed to him until a reasonable hour in the morning, seeing that the immediate presence of the executors could be of no use, and that every necessary duty to the deceased could be performed, without needlessly disturbing them.

The morning was ushered in by the deep-toned announcement that death had done his work. The air was thick and murky, and the heavy-tolling church-bell seemed muffled by the density of the atmosphere. The dependents on the departed squire had only half-opened their little shops, and groups of the inhabitants were scattered here and there, detailing the particulars of the event. Yet unbreathed was the damning secret of his life, the crowning agony of his death ; and there was a stillness, and a sadness, and a gloom over the place, which did honour to the feelings of those who then had known him only as a generous landlord and a liberal customer.

At the Hall, the silence had something awful in it —

the servants trod lightly along the half-darkened passages, and the only sound which broke upon the ears of George and the Doctor, as they entered the doors, was the howling of the dead man's favourite dog, which had been tied up that he might not force his way to the room where the corpse of his once fond master lay.

Lovell had arrived previously, and, conjointly with the apothecary, had given such directions as were immediately necessary, and was waiting to receive his co-executor, who presented his friend the Doctor to the worthy Rector, adding in an under-tone to MacGopus, that, now he had become personally acquainted with him, he hoped and trusted he would contrive to remember his name.

Soon after the arrival of his lordship, he and Lovell retired to the apartment where the will was deposited ; and the Doctor, having by a sort of instinctive genius hunted out the library, proceeded, as usual, to pounce upon a book, and establish himself in a corner of the little breakfast room, where there was a fire, in order to the quiet perusal of it ; which, as he had no other part to perform, and was, in his own phraseology, “only a passenger,” he thought himself fully justified in doing.

There is a naval joke, pretty common amongst those of the “cloth,” touching a sailor’s walk. He gets leave to go ashore to take a walk, and that walk is uniformly comprised in the distance between the landing-place and the nearest public house : so with MacGopus ; his morning walk, let him be where he might, was extended just from the breakfast parlour to the library : the only difference between the pursuits of the erudite surgeon and those of his shipmate Jack being, that the day’s pleasure of the one consisted in “pouring down,” and the other in “poring over.”

According to the directions of the departed squire, the looked-for will was found — it was short, concise, and entirely written by himself, bearing date only a few days previous to the last accession of his disorder. It contained a most ardent and unqualified eulogium upon his beloved Fanny, to whom he felt he could never sufficiently express his regrets and remorse at what had occurred to

induce her departure, exonerating her from all blame, and affording, as he said, the strongest proof of his feelings towards her, by leaving her the whole of his property, real and personal, of every kind and description, with the exception of a few legacies; a thousand pounds to Miss Lovell, as a small mark of his gratitude for her conduct towards his wife; five hundred pounds to each of the executors, and some smaller remembrances to a few of the neighbours and the servants. He left it entirely to the discretion of his wife to dispose of Binford, "which," he added, "for several reasons, I am inclined to think she may be disposed to do; and I make this remark upon the subject, only to relieve her mind as to any wish or feeling of mine respecting her occupancy of that place."

The minor directions, with respect to his funeral, are not worth recording; but it must be confessed, that, as a triumphant vindication of his ill-fated Fanny, nothing could be more agreeable either to Lovell or Lord Weybridge, than the distribution of his property which he had actually made; besides, independent of their personal feelings with regard to the effect producible upon the character and respectability of one, about whom they were *both* so deeply interested, there was, in the disposition of his wealth, a strong and powerful evidence of a feeling, not only of forgiveness but of repentance, which offered the only atonement in his power for an act, the result of violent and diabolical passion, unsoothed by religion and untempered by principle.

It was clear to Lord Weybridge, that with any thing like a¹ show of decency, he could not quit Binford until after the funeral, nor indeed until such communications had been received from the widow as might regulate their conduct in the execution of the trust which had devolved upon them. Lovell suggested, that if Lord Weybridge would so far condescend, he ought, if possible, to make a visit to Mrs. Harbottle at Mopeham. But his lordship, who was in his heart anxious to stay where he was, pleaded the¹ circumstance of her serious illness as an objection to this plan. However, upon consulting the Doctor, MacGopus, who really acted Mentor to the life,

expressed his opinion, of course, in direct opposition to that of his noble friend, he being beyond all things anxious to keep him away from the society of his Calypso, in which he was quite sure, to use his own phrase, he would, sooner or later, make "*a tom-noddy*" of himself.

Lovell declared that nothing but his own infirmities would prevent his making the journey, but that certainly he could not take the liberty of urging his lordship to the fatigue of the expedition.

"The fatigue will do him good," said MacGopus.

"But what time will it occupy?" asked his lordship.

"Not so much time as must, for decency sake, elapse between this and the funeral."

"Well," said Lord Weybridge, "I certainly did not anticipate such an undertaking.—I confess I should be most happy to pay every proper attention to Mrs. Harbottle; and if you consider, either as a matter of duty, it would be right, or as a matter of courtesy, civil to go, I am off—especially if you think, that in her present state of health, a more abrupt communication of the contents of the will, or the necessity of a correspondence, would excite or agitate her too much."

"You're a good fellow, George," said MacGopus, to the infinite astonishment of the Rector, who was not, of course, aware of the connection which had so long subsisted between our Telemachus and the Kish-like sage who so familiarly accosted him.

"It will, indeed, be very kind of his lordship," added Lovell.

"Say no more, say no more," said Lord Weybridge. "You'll go with me, Doctor? and we will start forthwith. Is Miss Lovell visible?" said his lordship to Lovell.

"Indeed is she, and will be glad, I am sure, if you would take charge of any letter or packet which she may wish to send to her friend."

"If the Rectory is in the road," said MacGopus, "you can call, on your way."

"Your suggestion is prophetic—it is in the road," said Lord Weybridge; "I should think an hour will suffice for preparation—I must write to my mother before my de-

parture, and, perhaps, my dear sir, you will complete whatever directions are necessary here, and at one we will be at your door."

"This is, indeed most kind and generous, my lord," said the Rector; "it is a severe duty imposed upon you, but—"

"Oh, not a word," said George; "we'll be in time, depend upon it."

Saying which, Lord Weybridge and the Doctor quitted the house of mourning, and proceeded to Dale Cottage, his lordship being every where received with marked respect from his neighbours, whose faces, however, it was not very probable he should often, if ever, see again.

When they reached home, two letters from Severnstroke awaited them, both from Lady Frances, which, as they may serve to illustrate the progress of our history, shall be submitted to the reader.

The first to Lord Weybridge:—

"Severnstroke, Tuesday.

"My dear George,

"Your sudden departure hence has thrown a sad gloom over us—we are, however, in hourly expectation of your return. It seems, from what we have heard, that Mr. Harbottle is in a most dangerous state; and if so, as you can have no cause for remaining after your interview with him, you will of course join us as soon as possible.

"It is impossible to describe to you how beautifully dear Lady Catherine conducts herself. After what has been communicated to her, with regard to your sentiments, of course her situation is painful and delicate, but she feels that you are performing a duty; and although it is impossible not to perceive how deeply she is affected by your absence, yet the way in which she bears up is so amiable, so little selfish, and so extremely natural, that I have conceived a higher opinion of her mind and character than even I had previously formed. The Duchess is quite charmed with the prospect—she is a dear, amiable creature, and I am sure if any thing were wanting to complete the excellence of her character, her conduct, as a mother,

would alone be necessary. I assure you we should all be in the highest possible spirits if you were back—we very much miss the dear Doctor, who is, in truth, a worthy creature, and, as being one of your sincerest and oldest friends, doubly valuable to me.

"I cannot rest without writing to you, to tell you how we desire your return. If you should see any of our neighbours, pray remember me kindly to them. I have written to the Doctor from myself.

"Ever yours, dear George,
"affectionately,

"FRANCES SHERINGHAM."

This was a decided refresher—one of those gentle jogs to the memory which are seldom pleasant, and which never could have arrived more inopportunely. George's answer, however, was as little agreeable to Lady Frances as her letter was to him; he wrote hastily to tell her of the necessity he felt himself under of going to Mopeham officially. That he could not leave Binford until after the funeral, and above all, he told her, that the confession of Harbottle had entirely overthrown every imputation upon the character of his widow, and consequently those which had been cast upon Miss Lovell; winding up this disappointing epistle by informing her ladyship that they were engaged to take luncheon at the Rectory, in their way out of Binford. He begged his compliments to the Duchess and Lady Catherine, and took no further notice of the allusions to the excellence of the noble mother, or the amiability of her right honourable daughter; and, having sealed the despatch, enquired of MacGopus what his exemplary parent had communicated to him.

But MacGopus was a man of honour, and he declined answering his noble friend's question, and denied him in such a calm, provoking way, that George was driven to the last pitch of anger, when the Doctor, with the same tranquillity which characterised all the rest of his proceedings, threw the much desired epistle into the fire.

Its contents consisted of an exhortation to the Doctor to keep George out of the snares of the Lovells, to impress

upon his mind how serious his engagement was to Lady Catherine, and how seriously she considered it; and above all, to take every fair and proper advantage of the presence of Count Montenay to excite and influence her son's jealousy, striving, if possible, to prevent any confidential conversation between him and Emma, and, at all events, to hurry him back to his house and visitors as speedily as possible.

MacGopus could have had but two reasons for not permitting Lord Weybridge to read this letter. One, on his own peculiar principle of action, because his lordship particularly wished to read it; and the other, because he was resolved, that let him act as he might during the critical period of their absence from Severn Stoke, he would not appear to his lordship to take instructions, or act under any superior influence. The Doctor was far from denying the correctness of what Lady Frances said, nor did he demur to the propriety of her endeavours to extricate her son from the trammels of Miss Lovell, whose merits and beauties, as he had not yet seen her, he could by no means appreciate; and to whose criminality, as he considered it in having "taken up" with a French count, stood so prominently forward in the list of her faults, that it was scarcely with common patience he could listen to the praises which George was still perpetually bestowing on her, certain as he was at the moment, that he would be forced eventually to surrender all hopes of possessing her as a wife.

The time drew nigh when the eyes of MacGopus were to be feasted with the sight of this rural beauty, and that, too, under an impression of sorrow and of sadness; and fascinating as loveliness may be in all the glow of health, and all the brilliancy of high spirits, to one who could estimate the feelings of Emma's heart, the look of grief, and the character of pity and distress, could not fail to add new charms to her sweetly expressive countenance.

"I suppose," said MacGopus, as the carriage drove up to the door, "we shall see this Johnny Crapaud?"

"I will see him," said Lord Weybridge; "upon that point I am resolved—by the by, let us walk on, it is

not worth while getting into the chariot for so short a distance—let them pack the carriage and bring it to the Parsonage."

"A very good notion," said the Doctor.

"Come, then—don't be long," said his lordship to Roberts and the other people; "in half an hour we shall be ready to start—*Allons donc.*" Saying which, he put his arm into that of MacGopus, and stepped out with a steadyish step, but a fluttering heart, to the humble home of his beloved, his almost betrothed Emma.

"I think this visit indiscreet," said MacGopus.

"Not to make it would be rude and barbarous," replied Lord Weybridge.

"Better to be rude and barbarous outright, than be kind in appearance and barbarous in reality."

"I have no intention to be barbarous."

"Consider, said the Doctor, "you have read Lady Frances's letter—does not that corroborate all I have said?"

"Am I not my own master?"

"No, you have delegated your authority."

"But my faith is plighted here."

"No such thing, you never spoke to the girl upon the subject."

"But I opened my heart to her dearest friend."

"Since which you have openly neglected her—admitted her misconduct—consented to marry another—while she, on the other hand, has accepted your *congé*, and engaged herself, for all you know, to a Frenchman."

"Oh, hang that," said George; "however, the moment of trial is at hand; of course if *that* should be the case, I have only to take my hat and go."

"You must do that if it should not be the case," said the Doctor.

"Hush!—we are there," said his lordship.

"No, we are not; we are here," said the Doctor.

"Well, so be it," said his lordship; "it is vastly lucky you will condescend to admit that we are any where."

A loud ring at the bell summoned the servant to the gates, and the visitors entered the pretty grounds of the Parsonage. They reached the house-door, and the servant

preceding Lord Weybridge and the Doctor, led the way to the Rector's library, where they found him occupied in writing to Mrs. Harbottle, as was his daughter, he said, in her boudoir. George felt much more agitated than he had expected ; and a sort of faintness came over him, which induced him, after MacGopus had seated himself, to quit the room, which was excessively warm, for the drawing-room, where the fire was less and the space larger.

"Don't let me interrupt you, sir," said MacGopus to Mr. Lovell ; "I can find occupation while you are writing"

George strolled to the window ; and looked to the lawn, which, being studded and fringed with evergreens, had still, during the gleams of sunshine, the appearance of summer. A thousand recollections flashed into his mind at the sight of this once familiar scene ; and the varied events of the last eight-and-forty hours, combined in imagination with those which would probably occur during the next similar period of time, had abstracted him from surrounding objects, when the gentle voice of his beloved Emma—for so she was—aroused him from the painful reverie in which he was absorbed.

"My dearest Emma, is it you?" said his lordship ; "how I rejoice again to see you!" At the same moment clasping both her hands in his, and drawing her towards him in all the warmth of friendship.

"What a dreadful cause of meeting!" said Emma, who, in the naturalness of her character, delighted as she was to behold the only man who according to her own admission had ever interested her, first thought of her unhappy friend ; "and how kind, how very kind of you to consent to take this long and tiresome journey!"

"Fanny is *your* friend," said Lord Weybridge, "and that of itself would be a sufficient reason for my sacrificing any little personal convenience to her service ; but, besides, it is my duty, and we sailors have a strong idea of the obligations of duty. But tell me, Emma, are you yourself quite well?"

"Yes," said or rather sighed Emma ; "I am well; but really these frequently-repeated trials upon the spirits do

us more injury than all the bodily ills to which we are subject."

" You have not been suffering mentally ? " said George, tenderly.

" Indeed, indeed I have," said Emma : " the separation of Fanny from her husband—my association with her in the flight—the consequences of that expedition, as far as the gossip of the neighbourhood can affect me, and the constant agitation and excitement under which I laboured, till I knew the dreadful cause of her flight, which I have only been acquainted with since my father's return from the Hall, have preyed upon me and made me wretched."

" Were you ignorant of the dreadful history ? "

" Totally, and the circumstance itself, as it turns out, added to the pain I felt, and increased the doubts with which I had to contend, during our journey, and during my stay with Fanny ; for whenever poor Charles Harvey's name was mentioned, her agitation so visibly increased, that I could not—and perhaps it was not unnatural—divest myself of the idea that she had somehow committed herself with him, and that I had been made a dupe in the part I took between them. How many, many pardons do I now require from her for my base and ungenerous suspicion ! Still I think I might have been trusted."

" However, your triumph and consolation are now at hand," said his lordship—" my message to her will set all that matter right, and you will again rejoice without qualification in the noble course you have pursued. But tell me, Emma, did Fanny convey my message to you ; that which I entrusted to her when I was here and you were absent ? "

Emma blushed deeply, and trembled exceedingly. George took her hand ; she gently, but not angrily, withdrew it.

" Don't ask me," said Emma ; " this is not a time to speak on such subjects. We are here in the midst of death and distress, and you—you since that period have been prejudiced against me. Some other day we will talk of it—at present let us confine ourselves to the sad business which must be transacted, and which you are so kind as to undertake."

"But, Emma," said George, forgetting his mother, the Duchess, Lady Catherine, and even the French count into the bargain, "she *did* deliver that message?"

Emma bowed her head assentingly.

"And has any thing since occurred to induce you to decide against the petition it contained?"

She blushed still deeper, and strove to take her hand from his, which held it; her silence was followed by a tear, which stole down her cheek. Then it was that the truth flashed into his mind — then all the horrors of jealousy struck into his brain — the history of the French count was all too true! The object he had in view, by pressing the question before his departure for Mopeham, was a most important one; if he could ascertain that the message he had sent had been delivered, and if Emma had acceded to his solicitations, he resolved, during the week of absence from home, to open the real state of his heart to his mother, and lay the blame of precipitancy upon her who had excited hopes and expectations on the part of the Duchess and Lady Catherine, which his commission to her ladyship did not certainly warrant. The truth is, that at the moment he gave her the permission to open the subject, he believed Emma to have transgressed the commonest and most observed rules of society; he now saw her exonerated, and free from the imputation; his love was as strong as ever; and he resolved to abide by the resolution which he had made when he was able to judge her character fairly, and not suffer himself to be the victim of an alteration in that resolution, made under a totally false impression.

The trembling, blushing, and weeping, however, awakened in his restless and sensitive mind the new and still more dreadful suspicion of the Count's ascendancy; he checked his anxiety to enquire about him; he would not exhibit himself in the character of a jealous lover, but he was more than ever resolved to see and judge for himself how far his apprehensions were well grounded.

"Pray, pray," said Emma, "do not press this conversation to-day; we have much to think of, for poor Fanny in her new position. Your own kind, generous

heart, will tell you that we should devote our thoughts to her. Do let us join my father, and consider what would be her best course, for I very much fear her health is so delicate that it will be impossible for her to leave her present residence for some time."

"At your bidding," said George, convinced that her heart was otherwise disposed of, "I will be as mute as the grave; we shall meet again on my return, for I have decided to remain here till after the funeral; and then, Emma —"

"Come, come, Captain Sheringham," said Emma — "Lord Weybridge, I mean — remember your promise — come into the library."

She led the way, and George followed her implicitly, with his eyes fixed upon her, in a stupor of doubt and apprehension, scarce knowing where he was going.

"Papa," said Emma, opening the door, and instantly starting back at seeing a stranger, "I — beg pardon —"

"It is only my particular friend, Dr. MacGopus," said Lord Weybridge, "who will be delighted to have the honour of making your acquaintance, and of contradicting every thing you may venture to advance from this day forward."

MacGopus was near-sighted, but he saw the sort of reproachful look which Emma gave his lordship, and satisfied himself that whatever the Frenchman was, he had not quite succeeded in driving his lordship out of the heart of the Parson's Daughter.

"You must not believe Lord Weybridge," said MacGopus; "he always gives his best friends the worst character."

"I have ordered them to put luncheon in the dining-room," said Miss Lovell to her father.

A saying which much rejoiced George, because, as he knew the Count was domesticated in the house, he felt convinced that he would "show" at luncheon; or at least, if he did not, he should set it down as an *affaire finie*, and that being the accepted lover, and consequently intended husband of Emma, it was considered more delicate to keep him out of sight.

Emma here proceeded to enter into conversation with her father, and speedily Lord Weybridge was called into council.

"We make no apology to you," said Mr. Lovell, addressing MacGopus; "ours is really business, and with much to do we have but little time."

"Not a word, sir, not a word," said the Doctor, who reseated himself in the leathern chair by the fire, and began to read again; but, had there been any body to watch the venerable sly-boots, he would have perceived that he was not quite so devoted to his book as he ordinarily was; he kept his keen black eyes glancing away from the page to the face of the young lady, who was looking lovely beyond description; and as he saw the heads of the consulting two brought near each other across the table, he did not fail to observe that the fair curls of the sweet girl were remarkably near the black whiskers of his noble friend, and that his lordship did neither start nor draw back from an approximation which, it must be confessed, could not but have been extremely agreeable to him.

"Here 'll be Old Nick to pay," thought MacGopus; "it is all over — this must be the girl; I wish I was well out of it: but what is it to me — I 'm only a passenger." And so he laid down his book — drew forth a huge round snuff-box — rapped the lid, as was his custom — opened it — took a glorious pinch — shut the box — restored it to his pocket — and took up his book again.

The conversation had continued for nearly half an hour, and the carriage had been at the door some time, when luncheon was announced. MacGopus, who did not comprehend the motives which Lord Weybridge had for stopping, but attributing his desire to partake of the repast to his anxiety for enjoying another half hour of Emma's society, pressed him to go off without eating; but Emma, in returning to her own room to seal her letter to Fanny, entreated the Doctor to stop in a tone so winning, that the stoic himself was melted, and he withdrew all further opposition to the delay.

When Emma was gone, and Lovell just concluding his

despatches, Lord Weybridge led MacGopus into the drawing-room.

" You know why I stay luncheon ? "

" No."

" To see the Frenchman — he is in the house, I know."

" Ugh ! I don't think that's all of it."

" Hush ! "

Emma having returned, charged his lordship with her packet, and Lovell, having completed his communication, enclosed the will itself, and delivered it to Lord Weybridge; and thus having completed all the business essential to the journey, and Emma having again reverted to the horrid circumstances connected with the whole affair, and her fears of Fanny's health, they proceeded to the room where luncheon was laid ; Mr. Lovell, assisted by the Doctor and George, breaking through his usual custom, by proceeding to join them.

They reached the dining-parlour — the table was laid for five persons. George looked at MacGopus ; he seated himself next Emma. MacGopus placed himself on the other side of her ! she appeared discomposed, and somewhat fidgety, as if she expected some other person who ought to sit there : she said nothing, but began doing the honours.

George, who saw all this manœuvring, became not a little agitated, and, anxious to bring the affair to a crisis, said, " By the by, here stands Banquo's chair, whom do you expect here ? "

" Oh ! " said Lovell, " only the Count ; he 'll be here I dare say in a minute. I believe," added he, " Dr. MacGopus, you have committed a sort of treason against my daughter ; you have usurped unwittingly the Count's place next to her."

This confirmed all the worst suspicions which George had entertained.

" I beg pardon, sir," said the doctor, " I 'll move down — make way for my superiors."

" What Count — is — this ? " said George.

" Count Montenay," said Emma ; " havn't you heard of him ? he has been staying here now for some time."

A servant having entered the room with some new dish, Emma continued the speech by enquiring where the Count was.

"He is coming directly, Miss," said the man.

"Oh dear," said Emma, evidently deeply interested about him, "open the drawing-room doors; he can come that way, it will save him the trouble of going round."

Her solicitude was not lost upon either Lord Weybridge or MacGopus.

"Come, come," said Emma, in a bewitching tone of sweetness, to the approaching but yet invisible stranger.

The servant threw open the battants, and in bounded a beautiful boy, of about nine years old, with his hair all about his ears, and a hoop over his shoulder.

"Who is *this*?" said Lord Weybridge.

"Oh!" said Emma, "I must present you in due form. That, Alexis, is Lord Weybridge; this, my lord, is my darling, Count Alexis Montenay."

"Ugh!" said MacGopus, looking at George with an expression wholly indescribable.

"*That* Count Montenay?" said George.

"Yes," said Emma. "Oh! come, then, you *have* heard of him before? isn't he a dear little fellow?"

"I assure you," said Lovell, "that when I am forced to send him to school I shall be most sadly vexed: he is a good boy, and I have grown as fond of him as if he were my own."

"He was my companion all the way from Mopeham," said Emma, "and is my companion always now."

And then she began filling his plate with all the things she knew he liked best, and parted his hair, and patted his cheek, and drew his chair to the table, and divested him of his hoop, and did all she could to make the dear nice little child comfortable.

"Doctor," said Lord Weybridge, "I think we must start; we shall be late on the road."

"And a dull, dull road it is," said Emma; "however, you will of course sleep by the way."

"I put myself under the guidance of the Doctor," said George, whose eyes remained fixed upon the unconscious

child in a sort of amazement. Say any thing about the protracted error in which he had been living, he neither could nor would ; and all his anxiety now was to get away, so that the Doctor and he might give full scope to their self-malediction for their remarkable credulity and super-eminent innocence, in never having thought it worth the trouble to ascertain what might be the age of the redoubtable French count, who had caused so much mischief and occasioned so much speculation.

Emma, who, with all her apparent quietude, was as quick as lightning, saw in a moment that something connected with the boy had affected both her guests. She could not, certainly, anticipate or imagine that kindness and attention displayed to an orphan child, had been misinterpreted or misrepresented into a flirtation, or an attachment, or something even worse ; but she was conscious that her little favourite had, somehow or another, made a sensation. The visitors tacitly agreed that any explanation would tell considerably against their own wisdom and judgment, and accordingly hurried their departure ; and, in less than ten minutes after the appearance of the boy, they were snugly seated in Lord Weybridge's carriage, having taken a kind and affectionate leave of the Rectory, and, as the Doctor thought, as far as his lordship was concerned, a particularly affectionate leave of the Parson's Daughter.

CHAPTER III.

— He was a man
That lived up to the standard of his honour,
And prized that jewel more than mines of wealth. OTWAY.

" WELL, Doctor," said Lord Weybridge, pulling up the carriage-window, " the Count's story is a bit of a botch."

" Eh ! you might have taken the trouble to enquire his age, before you deserted your sweetheart upon his account," said the consoling Doctor.

"To be sure, how calumnies and falsehoods prevail!" said George. "Poor Emma! — the kindly affection for an orphan child to be perverted into a flirtation with a gallant, gay Lothario!"

"Have you been putting your foot in it again, George?" said MacGopus; "renewing your suit — blowing the ashes —"

"Pooh!" replied his lordship; "Emma interdicted any conversation on the subject."

"Very judicious, too," said MacGopus. "No doubt the same communicative friends from whom you derived your intelligence about the Count have been favouring her with the details of your affair with Lady Catherine."

"An affair of which I am resolved to hear no more myself," said George. "If I have been induced, under the influence of falsehood and misrepresentation, to abandon the only being with whom I could be happy, and to violate a pledge solemnly and seriously given, I contend that the moment I am undeceived, and the accused sufferer is exonerated from blame and reproach, the acts which I have committed under that erroneous impression are nullified; and the promises I may have made, or the permission I may have given, are utterly annihilated."

"You have heard the Scottish song, George," said MacGopus —

"It is well to be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new."

I don't think the Duchess — or her daughter — or her son — if it were referred to him, would see the case exactly in the light in which you see it. You have allowed your mother to make the match, and she has done it; and as for your backing out of it, I'll tell you, you can't. I told you, you never would have this Emma, and you never will."

"At all events, if they have hooked me," said Lord Weybridge, "I will show them some sport in landing me; I shall make a few struggles and floundering; and the first evolution I shall perform will be writing to my mother from the place at which we may decide upon dining, and stating to her the exact position in which I am placed,

and how entirely my happiness, as well as my honour, will be jeopardized by abandoning Miss Lovell."

"I would not do any such thing," said the Doctor; "it will only expose you to their observation, and can do no good."

"And I am quietly to sit down a miserable man for life. Oh! what would I give that the infernal black-sided ship had not run down my poor uncle's yacht, and that I was again the plain George Sheringham I was, without title or fortune, proud and happy to share my splendid half-pay with Emma!"

"Where's the use of wishing?" said MacGopus; "besides, for all your pining and whining, you like playing lord as well as your neighbours; so let us talk of something else — I'm sick of your love story."

Lord Weybridge and the Doctor made out the journey tolerably. They quarrelled four or five times, and were, of course, reconciled as often. George put into execution his design of writing to his mother; and having pursued their route, the travellers reached Mopeham in the middle of the next day, having slept where they dined.

Lord Weybridge's proceedings after his arrival are so fully detailed in a letter which he despatched to his colleague, the Rector, that a perusal of that document will render any other description of them unnecessary.

"Mopeham, Nov. 18. 1830.

"My dear Sir,

"I arrived here about one o'clock; and having transacted the most important part of my business, sit down to report progress for your information. I very much regret to state that I found our poor friend, Mrs. Harbottle, dreadfully ill—worse, indeed, than I had anticipated, even after your account. I very much fear that consumption is already far advanced. A few weeks have made a more extraordinary alteration in her appearance than you can imagine; and the shock which the intelligence of her husband's hopeless situation, delivered abruptly by her aunt, who is a most extraordinary person, has completely broken her down—in truth, I think her position miserable, and I

have strongly recommended, if she can bear the journey, to change the scene as soon as possible. She seems earnestly to desire to see Miss Lovell ; but, of course, I dare not second her wishes, knowing, as I do, how indispensable to your comfort and happiness her presence is at the Rectory.

" Mrs. Harbottle, immediately on the arrival of the express from her husband, soliciting her to come to him, started to fulfil his desire ; but at the end of the first stage it was found wholly impossible for her to continue the journey, and she was compelled to return.

" She has expressed her positive resolution never to revisit Binford. She was dreadfully agitated when I read the will to her, and she found herself the possessor of the whole of her late husband's immense fortune. Of course it is not possible for me to attract her attention at this moment to minor details ; but it is evident to me that she will sell the Binford property, and the house and furniture as it stands, for she expresses something like horror at the idea of seeing any thing which can be associated in her mind with the events which have recently occurred in that place. I regret the determination to which I clearly see she will come upon this point, because I think the intimacy which would subsist between her and Miss Lovell, if she again took up her residence at the Hall, would be agreeable and even advantageous to both.

" I have promised to remain here till to-morrow afternoon, in order to give Mrs. Harbottle time to rally her strength, so as to endure a second conversation upon business. I have already explained to her, as briefly as possible, the arrangements we have made with respect to the funeral, of which she entirely approves.

" I do assure you, I never have seen a more interesting or melancholy picture of human suffering than she exhibits ; and, as I have before said, the weakness and littleness of mind so predominant in the character of Miss Jarman are ill calculated to soothe or mitigate her sufferings. The sight of me, associated as I was in her thoughts with our unfortunate friend Harvey, connected as he is in her memory with the terrible revenge of her rash and desperate

husband, affected her dreadfully, and I almost regretted that I had undertaken the mission. However, she now bears to speak of past events, and with care and attention might rally ;—if she has not these, my firm opinion is, that her days are numbered.

“ I have much more to communicate, and shall have more still, when we have had our second conversation to-morrow ; but it will be as useless for you to answer this, as it will be needless for me to write again, for your letter would cross me on the road, and I shall be at Binford myself before any letter from me could reach you.

“ Pray make my kindest remembrances to Miss Lovell, for whom I shall have a packet from Mrs. Harbottle ; and believe me, my dear Sir,

“ Yours, most faithfully,
“ WEYBRIDGE.”

On the day following that on which Lord Weybridge despatched this, he had, according to previous arrangement, a long interview with the suffering widow, who appeared to agree with him in thinking change of scene would be serviceable to her,—if, as she added, her life was worth preserving ; but that, without a companion who suited her, and one with whom she could freely talk of by-gone days and circumstances, even that experiment would be of doubtful effect. She again glanced at the possibility of securing Emma for a long visit, and seemed particularly struck with a suggestion of Lord Weybridge, that as she had resolved not to re-visit Binford, she might engage not only Emma but her father, on a visit to her at some other place, by which means the objection he had to be left without his daughter might be overcome ; and his duty devolving upon his curate during his absence, the variation of scene and circumstance might have also a salutary effect upon him.

Fanny had been so short a time in her new situation, that when Lord Weybridge first made the proposition of her removal to some sea-watering place, habit so preponderated, that she felt as if she were unable to decide upon any measure of such a nature without referring to some

other authority ; she had not become accustomed to the independence of the wealthy widow ; and such is human nature, and such the inherent kindness of woman's heart, that hateful as her husband had rendered himself by his odious and cold-blooded destruction of a fellow-creature, she could not think of her own position without weeping for days that were gone, and mingling in her sorrow, for the destruction of a fabric of domestic happiness which once looked brightly, remorse and repentance for the share which she attributed to herself in its overthrow and downfall.

Lord Weybridge had entered upon the duties of executorship with a warmth and earnestness, which, however amiable and friendly in their appearance, were, if truth could be entirely known, in no small degree attributable to the desire he felt of making occupation for himself and giving a plausible reason for his protracted absence from Severnstroke. Of Emma he spoke to Fanny as much as he felt himself allowed to do, under the peculiar circumstances in which the widow was placed. She, however, told him that she had faithfully fulfilled the commission with which she was intrusted ; and that certainly the manner in which Emma had received the communication fully corroborated all she had said to him upon the subject of her feelings, and entirely fulfilled the expectations she had formed of her answer.

It was clear that Fanny rallied from her own overwhelming sorrow in order to cheer Lord Weybridge with the prospect which was opened before him of happiness with the only woman, as he himself had said, who could insure it. Little did she think that every word she spoke was a dagger to his heart ; for although he made a point of running down the doubts and overcoming the obstacles which MacGopus appeared so charmed to create and establish in the way of his felicity, the Doctor had succeeded, more than George would admit to him, in establishing the obligations under which he lay with regard to Lady Catherine.

On their return homewards, MacGopus, whose sense of honour was nice, and whose feelings upon such points

were rigidly conscientious, went more minutely than ever into the discussion with his noble friend, and begged him by all that was sacred, and by every hope he had of comfort himself, to undeceive Miss Lovell upon the subject of their probable union. "Tell her," said MacGopus, "every fact connected with the affair — explain to her how you have been deceived with regard to her — show how her now proved exemplary conduct with respect to her friend has been misrepresented and misinterpreted, and let yourself down sufficiently low to admit your jealousy of a fine boy of eight years and a half old — vindicate your conduct in the best way you can — palliate the turn you have been induced to take ; but, for God's sake, don't leave the innocent girl to live a life of hope and expectation, which can never be fulfilled, and the frustration of which she will read in the published accounts of your marriage with another woman."

The firm tone and unflinching remonstrances of the Doctor most assuredly had their effect,— indeed George had at one time felt very much inclined to make Fanny his confidant, and confess to her the situation in which he was placed, or rather had placed himself; but he was checked in this instance by the recollection, that, in making the explanation, he must have admitted a belief that her abdication of Binford was not untinctured with impropriety, and that Emma's participation in her flight was the grand pivot upon which his mother had contrived to turn the whole question.

From Miss Jarman the Doctor had taken the most bitter aversion — nor did Miss Budd please him much better ; but he was charmed with Fanny, and certainly, if she had been in a more approachable state of mind, would have saved Lord Weybridge the trouble of stating his own ease with regard to the Parson's Daughter. As it was, he merely threw in a word or two, when in the evening the widow came for a short time into the drawing-room, and satisfied himself with the hope of being able to convert George to his way of thinking on the road home.

Fanny's gratitude to Lord Weybridge for his kindness and consideration was unbounded, and the thing of all

ethers that he would most have delighted to do would have been to invite her and the Lovells to Severnstroke; indeed he went the length of sounding the Doctor as to the possibility of such a measure, which, while it might be the most agreeable to himself, might be the most decisive to others.

"Pooh!" said MacGopus, with a sort of Johnsonian manner, which he sometimes did not disdain to affect. "Psha! — a murderer's widow packed up with a duke's wife, and a Parson's Daughter pitted against a duchess's darling — madness — no — no — be wise — be prudent — the follies you have committed you cannot recall — die like Cæsar, with decency."

"*Et tu Brute!*" said Lord Weybridge; "'why that is the most unkindest cut of all.' — If Emma, whom with your Scotch-Kirk bigotry you call a Parson's Daughter, is not fit to be pitted, as you term it, with a duchess's daughter, she is not fit I conclude in your estimation to be a peer's wife."

"Oh!" said MacGopus, affecting a profound humility; "I beg your lordship's pardon — I see I have touched the chord — but it is an unlucky twang I have given, for you have just said what you imagined I inferred, and what your mother most decidedly declares. The Parson's Daughter is not fit for the peer's wife."

"MacGopus," said his lordship, pale with rage; "I can bear your infernal, placid obstinacy as well as any man, better than any man, because I know when one suffers a bear to play fly-catcher, he must compound for occasional ugly pats; but you have touched a point where I admit I am not only vulnerable but sore. What do you mean by the cant of a Parson's Daughter? — a clergyman is essentially a gentleman."

"I beg your pardon," said MacGopus; "what d' ye think of the fellow who —?"

"There are exceptions to all general rules," said Lord Weybridge; "I am not going to wait for you to pick out of the whole mass of English clergy one or two, or one or two and twenty black sheep. I say, and I maintain it, that collectively there does not exist upon the face of the

earth such a body of piety, intelligence, education, and good conduct as the clergy of the Church of England. Look at their families — visit their houses — watch their pursuits — trace their amusements — scrutinise their duties — whence then can a man select a wife with a greater chance of happiness and comfort than from the domestic circle of such an individual as Lovell, or from the circles of hundreds like him in the same sacred profession?"

" You are all wrong, depend upon it," said the Doctor; " Miss Lovell, or whatever you call her, is an ornament in her own sphere — shines like a jewel — but it is in the dark, or when darkness is made just visible: she would not do at Severn Stoke — she would not do in Grosvenor Square."

" Virtue, modesty, talent, and ingenuousness will do every where," said George.

" Ay, ay — so you say now."

" Am I not ready to marry her — prove my words, and —"

" You can't marry her, I tell you," said the Doctor, with the provoking immovability from his point, which irritated George beyond measure: " it is not for the sake of running down the girl I talk, but to reconcile you to the separation which must take place between you."

" I certainly," said George, in explanation, " do not mean to put Emma Lovell in competition with Lady Catherine for showy accomplishments and ease of manners."

" Why not?" said MacGopus: " her manner is a great deal more agreeable, and I hate a showy woman."

" Why, mercy on me," said his lordship, " this instant you told me, or at least inferred, that I should be ashamed of Emma as a wife."

" Quite the contrary — proud of her as a wife — but —"

" Faith, I cannot talk with you; as my mother says, you blow hot and cold in the same breath."

" I am constant to one point. — You must undeceive the girl as to the possibility of your marrying her, or I shall."

" You !—what in the name of fate or fortune have you to do with it ?"

" I shall protect her ; her father is old, and kind, and blind, and patient, and thinks you a phoenix of perfection. I will not suffer you to play with her feelings."

" Nor," said Lord Weybridge, " will I suffer you to interfere with my conduct."

" So be it, my lord," said MacGopus : " we shall soon stop to change horses. I'll trouble your servant for my portmanteau and bag, and pack myself on the outside of the first stage-coach that comes, or walk my way up to London if it be necessary ; but I never will be a pander to your folly or your vices, and most assuredly not permit the peace of mind of an innocent and unworldly creature, like this Parson's Daughter, to be disturbed and ruined by you. You cannot marry her — you know you cannot — and you shall not make her fancy that you can."

The storm had now reached its height, and George took his ordinary course of remaining silent ; the real fact was, he did not regard his engagement to Lady Catherine in so serious a light as the Doctor did ; probably, because he was not quite so calm, or so much in the possession of his reasoning faculties as the Doctor was at the time that he made Lady Frances his accredited agent to the Duchess.

As for the resolution of the Doctor to interfere, he was quite certain if he once seriously made it, he would as surely put it into execution ; and, therefore, instead of flying into violent bursts of passion, or attempting to divert him from his design, he soothed him into good temper and a consent to continue the partner of his journey, by agreeing with him that something ought to be done, but that he felt as if he could better open his heart and develope the state of his circumstances to the Rector himself than to his daughter.

To this alteration of person the Doctor advanced no objection, and the journey was performed with safety and perfect harmony ; MacGopus entirely agreeing with his companion, that Mrs. Harbottle ought to have some favourite and agreeable friend as a companion, and that

nobody would be, if it could be so managed, half so suitable as Emma ; at the same time the Doctor, with one of his cunning looks and shrugs of his shoulders, declared his belief that it would be a work of impossibility to save the life of the widow, and that, therefore, it became a more urgent duty of those who were attached to her, to soothe and console her in her progress towards another and a better world.

George was altogether upset by the mission he had undertaken, the sight of his so recently blooming and lovely friend, the unexpected death, and still more unexpected confession, of the Squire, and the consciousness of his own credulity in believing the report which had been circulated about Emma, superadded to his return to Binford and a renewal of his acquaintance at the Rectory, were, in fact, too much for him to bear.

It must be said, however, to the honour of his lordship, that he bowed to the dictates of the worthy Doctor, and pledged his honour to come to such an explanation as should clearly and distinctly undeceive Miss Lovell as to any immediate hope of the fulfilment of what he nevertheless still held to be a sacred and binding promise.

It was not to be supposed, that all the passages of their existence at Binford, and the proceedings at the Hall, were to remain unknown or unnoticed at Severnstroke. Lady Frances had condescended to instruct her maid to enter into a correspondence with Plush and his favourite at Dale Cottage, and thence derive another version of the state of affairs, from that which the principal actors in them might choose to convey ; but these underhanded proceedings produced her ladyship very little gratification, and indeed very little intelligence ; for George, in his letters, had been as explicit as any man could be, with regard to his feelings about Emma, and had spoken so plainly and strongly, that nothing but the impossibility of leaving the Duchess and Lady Catherine would have prevented Lady Frances from hurrying over to Binford, to condole with dear Miss Lovell, and support her during the period in which her “ excellent papa ” was destined to be worried with the details of business.

Pen and ink, however, she had at command, and she did not fail to avail herself of the advantages derivable from their use; and although she was hindered from flying on the wings of friendship to visit her dear young friend, she took care that the following amiable and affectionate letter, borne from, rather than on the "grey goose wing," should reach Miss Lovell the very day after her dear son's departure for Mopeham.

"Severnstoke, Nov. —, 1830.

" My dear Miss Lovell,

" Although I am a good deal hurried with visitors, and a hundred little arrangements which occupy my time, I cannot avoid writing a few lines to you, to tell you how very much I feel for your situation and of that of your dear and excellent father.

" With respect to our poor friend, Mr. Harbottle, as I never possessed any very great admiration of his qualities or character, it would be affectation to pretend to any serious regret for his death, which is rendered less afflicting, although not less awful, by the circumstances connected with it; but I cannot express to you how truly I sympathise with poor dear Mrs. Harbottle, and with you naturally; your kindness to her has been extraordinary, and her gratitude must be no doubt proportionate; and I do hope that you will continue to give her as much of your society in her present bereaved state as you are able.

" I suppose she will return to Binford, for your sake, if for no other reason; and I shall hope to meet her when I return to the cottage, and shall most gladly add my endeavours to yours to support her in her sorrow, and check a disposition to melancholy and regret, which, if what I hear can possibly be true, ought not to weigh upon her mind too heavily.

" Of course you have seen dear George; I am sure he could not be at Binford many hours without making you a visit. The affair of Mr. Harbottle's death comes rather *mal apropos*, for it takes him away from home at a moment when his presence here is most essentially necessary. I dare say he will not tell any body at Binford the real truth; so I will mention it—*entre nous*—to you. He is engaged

to be married to Lady Catherine Hargrave, a daughter of the Duchess of Malvern ; — I say of the Duchess, because the poor Duke has been dead several years ; she is every thing I could wish in a daughter-in-law and he could aspire to as a wife. She is devoted to him ; and, I assure you, his sudden departure, and prolonged stay, have thrown a gloom over her which it requires all my little management to dispel.

“ Do me the favour not to allude to this affair if you see him on his return, for he is so extremely shy upon some points that he might be seriously annoyed with my having told you any thing about it. I am happy at the settlement of the arrangement, because I have always observed that an equal marriage makes the happiest *menage*. If a man, in George's station, were to have married a person of inferior rank, however amiable and respectable, she never could have felt at her ease amongst his family and connections ; on the contrary, she must have experienced, daily and hourly, mortifications from her total want of place and station. Catherine is a delightful creature, and, I am quite sure, would suit you amazingly in all her ways. I hope we shall some day have the pleasure of seeing you here, and at all events in London, which I think you told me you proposed visiting next season.

“ This is a charming place, and George is doing wonders with it ; a few thousand pounds scattered with taste makes such alterations, not only in the decorative parts of a house like this, but in its essential comforts.— I really think, when I get home to Dale Cottage, which I now much fear I shall not do till next summer, I shall feel as one always does returning to a small house from a large one, “ *cribbed, cabined, and confined* ;” however, there are certain *agremens* in your village which perfectly compensate for any minor inconveniences, and amongst them, assure yourself, my dear Miss Lovell, your society is to me the principal one.

“ Let me beg you to remember me to dear Mr. Lovell, and beg him not to exert himself too much in the discharge of his duty as executor, but to take care of himself, not only for your sake and his own, but for the sake of the

numberless people who look up to him and exist upon his bounty. Adieu, my dear Miss Lovell, and believe me, always most sincerely yours,

“ FRANCES SHERINGHAM.

“ P.S. Write to me when you have a leisure hour, and tell me what you are doing.”

This was an agreeable epistle — it saved a world of trouble, although it gave a world of pain. Emma read — re-read it — not exactly all of it — but those particular passages which authoritatively and unequivocally announced the marriage of Lord Weybridge with Lady Catherine Hargrave. It seemed to Emma that she had dreamed a horrible dream, or rather that she had suddenly awoke from a happy dream to a horrible reality. Could it be — was it possible, that George should have so entirely forgotten his own voluntary pledge — have belied the earnest feeling of his heart, and one which he had flown, at it were, to express the moment that his change of station had left him at liberty to act as he pleased ?

Emma knew the character of her right honourable correspondent, and she saw through the filmy web of compliment and civility which she had wove to catch her ; she could have disbelieved the whole of the contents of the letter — but no — Lord Weybridge was at hand to confute it, if it were untrue — besides, Lady Frances would not venture to insert the names of persons in connection with that of her son unless the thing was irrevocably fixed and settled.

And yet — George had made an effort to resume the subject the day before — she herself had checked it — and could he pursue a course of such useless duplicity, trifling with her feelings, and wantonly excite hopes of happiness, merely to crush them ? — no — that she could not believe. — Then how was it — or what was she to do, upon his return to the Rectory ? — If she spoke of Lady Frances's letter, he would naturally inquire what were its contents ; and if he did, she must, of course, confess their nature, which Lady Frances had especially begged her not to do.

In the difficulty of the case, she came to a resolution, to

which her father, to whom she imparted it, at first seriously objected : however, upon a further discussion of the subject, he acceded to her proposition ; and if he were not altogether in the secret of her feelings towards Lord Weybridge, she permitted him to understand so much of the point and object of Lady Frances's letter, that he held out but a very short time against the request she made, and at length agreed to it, convinced, by her manner and observations upon its results, that it was the wisest, the kindest, and the most delicate step she could take.

CHAPTER IV.

Till this cruel moment
I never knew how tenderly I loved thee;
But on this everlasting separation,
Methinks my soul has left me, and my time
Of dissolution points me to the grave.

LEB.

WHEN the travellers reached Binford — George having promised MacGopus to follow his directions in the conduct of his affair with Emma — they found Lovell as they had left him ; but his daughter was gone. She had winged her way to her suffering friend at Mopeham, and had so timed her departure as to pass Lord Weybridge on the road.

The mortification of George, when he heard this intelligence, is inconceivable ; for it left him exactly where he was when he first arrived at the Rectory, and placed him in the situation from which, of all others, MacGopus was most anxious to extricate him : but his mortification was very speedily converted into another feeling, when Lovell put into his lordship's hands a pacquet from his daughter, telling him, that, although he did not profess to be fully acquainted with its contents, it would be worse than affectation not to admit that he could comprehend the

general purport of her letter. That he placed such implicit reliance on the conduct and discipline of his daughter's mind, that he did not hesitate to state his entire concurrence in all she had said ; but he must beg, as a favour of his lordship, that the subject of her letter might not be referred to so long as he remained at Binford ; that afterwards, when the letter was burnt and its cause forgotten, they might live upon the same terms of friendship as then existed between them, and that the subject never should be mooted again.

George was a good deal staggered at this appeal, and at the presentation of Emma's epistle ; it was evident — how he did not exactly at the moment understand — that she had anticipated him in breaking off the connection, and that he was placed in the position of a professing suitor, unable to fulfil the promises which he was making — in short, it was so overpowering an incident to him, that it was with difficulty he could restrain his inclination to break the seal and ascertain the contents, until he reached Dale Cottage, where, esconced in his dressing-room, he burst open the envelope to read as follows : —

“ Binford, Thursday.

“ It may, perhaps, seem strange that I should take such a step as to address a letter to you, upon a subject, too, of a most delicate nature, and upon which I believe we have never exchanged a syllable ; but I have no hesitation in doing what I think and believe to be a duty to you and to myself. Upon your generous feelings and kind consideration I must rely for an excuse for thus committing myself.

“ Fanny — my kind, and now unhappy friend — lost no time in delivering the message to me with which you entrusted her, and I shall neither degrade myself nor affront you by denying that I received that communication with the liveliest sentiments of gratification and pleasure. I see neither impropriety nor indelicacy in confessing, under my present circumstances, that esteem and regard for you which I have never attempted to disguise, and which might, perhaps, had events turned out differently,

have given place to sentiments and feelings which I should have been proud and happy to have cherished and acknowledged.

" So much for what is past : — I feel I have nothing to reproach myself with — I have no intention of reproaching you. That you were misled with regard to the conduct of poor Fanny, I know ; and, having taken that impression of her innocent and almost compulsory flight from her home and her husband, I was naturally involved in her fault and her disgrace. This I completely understand ; yet when I found you again here, undeceived by the dreadful confession of the wretched man who yet lies unburied, I did hope that I should be cleared in your eyes of any misconduct, and flattered myself that I might, after your return from Fanny's, have hoped for a realisation of those visions which you yourself taught me to contemplate, and have endeavoured to make the happiness of one for whom my regard will for ever remain unaltered. You yourself spoke on the subject to me — you endeavoured to induce a conversation, which I checked, for reasons which I can and will yet give you — and you left me evidently discontented with my disinclination to listen to a renewal of topics which I had strong reasons for believing were most objectionable to part of your family.

" It was not because I esteemed you less — it was not because my heart had changed its feeling, nor that my regards were elsewhere directed, that I hesitated to listen to your protestations ; it was because I was sure, from what I had heard, that any connection between us would be a cause of contention and difference between you and your mother. God forbid that I should ever become the cause of such a dissension ! It was clear to me that I never could be received into your family upon an equality of terms, and I could not endure to be admitted into it on sufferance, and considered a blemish upon your ancient and honourable bearings. I then resolved to stifle every selfish feeling, and leave you free as air to select from a more suitable sphere one who might do you honour and credit, and who might be taken to your mother's bosom as a daughter-in-law, without one qualifying doubt or one

harassing regret. That sacrifice, George, I had determined to make, and that was the cause of my hindering you from touching upon a theme as near my heart as it ever could have been near yours. It was not alone that I was too proud to endure the humiliation, but I was too much devoted to you to permit you to suffer from my want of importance.

" This I had done — and I could have met you on your return from Fanny's, and have told you my decision. I could have parted from you like a sister, and have loved you all my life as a brother. But there are sufferings which even stouter hearts than mine cannot endure. I enclose your mother's letter, which I received yesterday. It may seem that I violate a confidence in making a communication to you which she desired me not to make; but, judging of the sincerity of that request by all the other parts of her letter, I do not think it of sufficient importance to outweigh what I feel to be a duty to myself, before I take the deciding step of my life — that of imploring you never to attempt to see me again — never to write to me — never, if possible, to think of me.

" Is it possible, that when, accidentally returning to my father's house, the opportunity was afforded you of speaking to me alone, you, parted as you were but a few hours from her who is destined to possess your heart and share your honours, could have availed yourself of that opportunity to affront, insult, and wound me with a revival of the sentiments which you expressed some time ago through Fanny? What have I done to deserve such cruelty?

" I tell you — because I have been taught to speak plainly and truly, and because truth is, in me, habit — that, when I first became acquainted with you, I admired those qualities which you appeared to possess, and sympathized in those sentiments which you were in the habit of expressing ; your mind, your manners, your accomplishments, all combined to increase the prepossession I felt, and I saw in you candour, and honour, and rectitude. Your conduct and conversation evidently inferred that the feeling I entertained was reciprocal, and I would have

sacrificed every hope in the world to have ensured your welfare and comfort. You suddenly became ennobled — did I seek you *then*? did I value your rank? did I gaze with delight on your coronet? No. The very first act of your life in your new station was to seek me out; and, in a manner to me the most flattering — why should I not say the most delightful — you, for the first time, solemnly and seriously declared your affection, and vowed eternal constancy to me. Why — why did you do this? Believe me, I do not reproach you for attending to the advice of Lady Frances, nor do I blame you for connecting yourself with the house of Hargrave — it is right, it is prudent, it is wise, it is dutiful to do so. But why break a heart, which you knew was your own, by singling out a being who never would have aspired to think of you as a husband in your new position in life, merely to delude, and then deride her. Oh! how — how — can this be reconciled with your previous conduct? How, when we met after that — how — only three days since — could you again allude to the declaration you had made, while your beautiful bride was waiting your return from the house of mourning to be led to the altar?

“ It is now all over — I can and I will bear it — the consolations of religion will support me in my trial, but I must not see you again — I have taught myself to look up to you as a superior being. Let me think of you — when I do — as you *were* — but let me hear nothing from you — I will sit calmly and patiently, and watch your bright career through life, and pray for your happiness: but, let me implore you, think no more of *me*. I here release you from every promise — every vow — every protestation: be free as air — and be happy — and oh! in that happiness be just, and good, and true, and so shall you prosper. I have said more, much more, than I intended — more than I ought to have said. My father knows of my having written this letter — indeed he will give it to you. With Fanny I may be of use — I may cheer and soothe her: — my aunt will go to Binford, to-morrow or the next day, to stay with my dear father. Again I implore you not to write to me — not to mention my name to Lady Frances —

never, never to revive the recollection of me in your mind, but utterly to forget a being who seems to have been needlessly made the sport of fate and the object of vexatious persecution. Again I repeat, I forgive and release you ; and most fervently and sincerely do I conclude my first and final letter to you, with the earnest prayer of my heart that God may bless you, and for ever !

“ EMMA.”

When George had read this letter and its enclosure, his feelings were more bitterly excited against his mother than he ever expected they could have been. The complaints of the deluded girl were all so just, so fair, and yet so mildly, so patiently expressed, and there was so much genuineness of feeling and devotion of sentiment in all she said, that it was with difficulty he masked his feelings so as to hand it over to his friend.

“ Well,” said MacGopus, when he had read it, “ I told you so — I said you would never marry that girl ; — now what I have said is come to pass, and no thanks to you — she wo’n’t have you.”

“ She will have me,” said Lord Weybridge ; “ and she shall.”

“ She never will,” said the Doctor ; “ I know something of human nature, and something of womanly pride and dignity — so long as your mother lives and flourishes, so long will she remain Miss, whatever her name is — ”

“ I will write to her this moment.”

“ She will return your letter unopened.”

“ I will follow her the instant the funeral is over.”

“ She will not admit you.”

“ I’ll write to Mrs. Harbottle.”

“ Who will merely repeat, in the young lady’s name, what she herself has personally said.”

“ I will, at all events, deny the fact of my engagement to Lady Catherine.”

“ You cannot deny it.”

“ Then by Heaven I’ll never fulfil it.”

“ You must.”

“ Am I to be forced — pressed into the service ? ”

" You could not argue against the system if you were—
but you volunteered."

" The fault is all your's."

" Ah, that's right, say it was *me*."

" So it was—the irritation—the ridicule—the calumny raised against Emma, and the effects of that infernal four square inches of mahogany-looking brandy-and-water."

" You made it yourself."

" So I should have prepared poison at that moment with equal readiness."

" Not you."

" How such an infernal mixture should have been seen in decent society, I cannot make out; nobody on earth but yourself would have thought of asking for such a thing."

" I don't know what people on earth may do, but I remember on the water you used to ask for it, and have it, too, as often as your neighbours. Don't reproach me with your own rashness—don't attribute to your condescension, in permitting me the privilege of doing what I like in your house, and what you like to do yourself every where else, the overthrow of your hopes and wishes—put it rather to the score of your own jealousy and credulity, and the active perseverance of your proud parent."

" Aye, aye, that's right," said Lord Weybridge, whose anger and mortification had nearly blinded him to the truth, " endeavour to make a breach between me and my mother, after having seconded all her propositions and supported all her arguments."

" I suppose you want me to leave you?" said MacGopus. " Another such imputation upon me, and we part for ever. No, sir, I have no wish to sow differences between you and Lady Frances; but I tell you the truth, and I tell it you fearlessly, because I am sure you ought to be convinced of it, and regulate your conduct accordingly. Neither did I carelessly nor wantonly take part with her ladyship upon the subject of Miss Lovell. I told you from the outset that you would not be permitted to marry her. I knew the abandonment of that match was the *sine*

qua non of your domestic tranquillity, and, having established that fact in my mind, I did not hesitate, when I heard your mother express an opinion of her conduct, founded upon facts, which induced even you to abandon her, to concur in an opinion, which I should be now as ready to retract as you are to revoke your pledge to Lady Catherine, if by so doing I could dissolve the bonds that are forged for you, or place Miss Lovell in your mother's estimation exactly where I think she ought to stand. But, I repeat it, it is now all too late, and honour and delicacy, both as respects Lady Catherine and regards Miss Lovell, demand that you should obey the injunctions contained in this letter; and as she releases you from all your engagements, you should release her from any further persecution."

"Forgive me, my dear fellow," said Lord Weybridge; "I speak hastily—I see things inaccurately—I cannot argue—I feel bitterly—you are right—quite right—and I am wrong—wrong in every thing I have done. How could I have been persuaded to imagine the possibility that a venerable excellent Pastor of our church should have sent his child as companion to a runaway wife, if he had not been assured of the reason and propriety of her abdication?"

"Or how," continued the Doctor, "could you be cheated into the conviction that your place in your beloved Emma's heart was usurped by a nice little boy of eight years and a half old! Psha! and then you blame *me*."

"Of one thing, I think," said Lord Weybridge, "you will not deny the possibility, if not the propriety, of my doing. There can be no objection, surely, to my stating exactly the circumstances in which I am placed to her father. There can be no indelicacy in that course; it will satisfy *me* without agitating or annoying her: and at all events I shall stand better with that good man than I do at present."

"I would not do any thing of the sort. You have got yourself into a scrape—this generous young lady has extricated you. You are free. What good can explanations do? She is much too clever and clear-sighted not to per-

ceive the trick. She has seen it—she has acted upon the conviction—and why any more? If you tell him why you suspected her, he will naturally conclude that you must have had a very mean opinion of his principles and propriety; and if you impart to him the last cause of your jealousy, he will think you a most particularly silly and easily deceived person, and refer you to your little rival with the top and hoop, as the most suitable companion for your conversation."

"I am not so sure of that," said Lord Weybridge, "and I shall consider that part of the question coolly and dispassionately. As to Emma herself, I believe, painful as is the conviction, that you are correct in your views, and that I ought to pursue her no farther; but I can adopt another course of conduct in another quarter, and at least fulfil my determination of not marrying any other woman."

"I tell you, you must."

"But at no stated period, at no given time. I may delay—procrastinate—"

"And so try your best at breaking another heart. No—your course is not merely negative: it is positive. It is as much your duty to marry Lady Catherine, as it is to give up the Parson's Daughter. To fulfil that duty honourably and conscientiously, you ought to time your marriage so, that it shall take place at the same period as you would, by circumstances, have been enabled to unite yourself to your former love."

"This is a bitter draught to swallow," said George.

"It is my duty to prescribe it for you," replied MacGopus. "And if you think it worth your while to profit by my advice in future, I tell you distinctly, you must be content to gulp it."

"This is sharp practice," said Lord Weybridge.

"It is the straight path of honour—you must take it."

"Well, give me time to think of it."

"You have other things to think of," said MacGopus; "other duties to perform—solemn and serious ones too;—that, perhaps, is so much the better."

"Aye—it might be so; but," said George, "recollect

the scenes in which those duties are to be fulfilled — that business to be transacted — under the roof of *her* father — in rooms once blest with her presence, and adorned by her society. Can I — can I abstract my thoughts — conquer my feelings, or subdue my recollections, while there, and devote myself to the dry matters of fact which must come under my consideration?"

"Can you? — yes," said MacGopus, "you can and must — because you ought. Duty demands that of you, as strongly as honour requires you to take the course I have pointed out in the other affair."

The time was not far distant when the trial was to be made. The arrival of the solicitor of the late Mr. Harbottle was shortly afterwards announced to Lord Weybridge, and his presence requested at the Hall, whither Mr. Lovell had, it appeared, preceded him. There was much to be done, indeed ; and, upon an examination into the state of his affairs, it appeared that the Squire's property, derivable from various sources, by far exceeded the amount at which it had been generally calculated.

Relations he had none living — incumbrances few — debts trifling. In short, by a rough calculation, it seemed probable that his widow, after the final arrangement of every thing and the payment of the few small legacies mentioned in his will, would be in possession of funded property and freehold estates to the amount of two-and-twenty thousand pounds per annum, exclusive of Binford Hall, which, with the land surrounding it, might be fairly calculated at ninety thousand pounds more ; the whole of which was left entirely at her own disposal, without control or limitation.

The disposition of this wealth by Harbottle, at his decease, exhibited a very striking instance of retributive justice, and the ruling quality — passion it cannot be called — strong in death. He had committed an act of atrocity, almost unparalleled in the annals of crime — the effect of sanguinary and diabolical revenge and misplaced jealousy. He had destroyed the man whom he imagined had injured him. He had, by so doing, securely gratified his malice, and triumphed, as he believed, over his guilty wife, by

depriving her for ever of the chance of again enjoying the society of his supposed rival in her affections. So far the fiend-like quality predominated.

Fanny left him. His first impulse was dread of the consequences of her revenge. After his interview with Lovell, that apprehension ceased, and he resolved to show the world how careless he was of her presence, by letting them see how lightly he felt her absence. During this career of dissipation and hypocrisy, a circumstance occurred, which led to the conviction of his prime minister, Hollis, of some act of fraud in the management of his household finances ; for Hollis, relieved of the check which a mistress and *her* housekeeper maintained over the expenses, procured the dismissal of that once favoured domestic, and, having secured her removal, began a course of cheating, which was eventually stopped by the barefaced impudence of its contriver.

Then came into Harbottle's mind the suspicion that Hollis, proved guilty in one case, might have been equally false and base in others. By dint of violence he extracted part of his criminality from the trembling wretch ; and the other part was confessed by the culprit, not in the hope of forgiveness — for he saw it was far past that — but in a triumphant burst of gratified revenge against his credulous master, whom he instantly quitted, leaving him in a state of anguish and horror not to be described.

Now came that sudden revulsion to which, upon all occasions, the Squire was liable. The more he dwelt upon the profligacy of the knave, the more brightly and purely shone the suffering excellence of his ill-treated wife. No reparation could ever be sufficient to atone for the barbarity of his conduct — no submission compensate for the cruelty which he had exercised towards her : — and all his hopes in this world were centred in the one great anxiety to obtain her forgiveness before he died. In this, as we know, he failed : but still, as in life he had considered money to be every thing, so in death he exhibited the same affection for it ; and satisfied himself that all he could do, to ensure forgiveness here and hereafter, he had consummated, when

he bequeathed every thing he possessed in the world to his unhappy Fanny.

On the day of the funeral, the shops of the principal tradesmen of the place were closed ; and in the park near the house, and along the road by which the procession was to move, considerable numbers of persons were assembled — some few out of respect, but by far the greater part from curiosity. There was wanting, in all the indications of feeling, that appearance of interest, which attaches to the closing scene of the life of a landlord and master who has been esteemed and beloved. The tradesmen lamented, as they did on the day of his death, because they had lost a good customer ; and the bettermost classes regretted the break-up of a “ free and easy” establishment, where they had been hospitably received and liberally regaled. But there was no absorbing sorrow — no silent grief — no mute watchfulness for the approach of the hearse. The boys in the throng played, jumped, and frisked about as usual ; and the itinerant venders of spruce-beer and gingerbread availed themselves of the somewhat unusual “ gathering,” to proclaim most audibly the merits of their respective commodities. One pea-and-thimble man, from a neighbouring fair, made his appearance ; but his little apparatus soon fell a victim to the just indignation of the parish-beadle, who, at one smash, entirely destroyed it with the crape covered knob of his long staff of office.

There was one heart deeply and bitterly affected — that of Lord Weybridge. His mind was attuned to sorrow. The recollection of his own position predisposed him for the reception of melancholy impressions : and there was, in the scene before him, a combination of qualities well calculated to excite a powerful feeling in his breast.

Here in the darkened dining-room, where so often he had seen the hospitable and then blameless Squire presiding at his festive board, making the walls echo to his boisterous mirth, stood the black coffin which contained his mortal remains. On the very spot where one of the tressels rested, which supported the corpse, he had first known Harvey — since snatched from the world. How ? —

There, too, he had seen the lovely, lively Fanny, dispensing smiles and kindness — now herself stretched on a bed of sickness, and most probably hastening to follow her ill-starred husband. And beyond all, had he there first seen his Emma — now separated from him for ever. Never had there been a wreck of happiness, and hope, and joy so sudden or so sweeping.

The mourners had now all arrived, and the hearse was drawn up to the door. The people stood around and watched, as the body was placed in the funeral carriage. The heavy tolling of the church-bell announced that the *cortege* had moved, and the train of followers increasing as it proceeded, a large concourse of spectators surrounded it when it reached the church.

Lovell read the beautiful service for the burial of the dead, with a solemnity that awed and moved his hearers. The coffin was lowered into the vault — the earth rattled on its lid — the ceremony ended — the people dispersed, and returned to their usual occupation or amusements ; and, in an hour after the gorgeous display of funeral pomp, Binford resumed its usual appearance : dinners were given in the noon, scandal was talked in the evening, ladies sang and gentlemen laughed, and the day concluded exactly as it would have closed had Harbottle been alive, or had never lived.

Lord Weybridge took leave of Lovell at the church-door, and proceeded to Dale Cottage, whence in a short time he started, accompanied by his friend the Doctor, in his travelling carriage, on their return to Severn Stoke.

CHAPTER V.

Say, what strange motive, goddess ! could compel
A well-bred lord t' assault a gentle belle ;
O ! say, what stranger course yet unexplored
Could make a gentle belle reject a lord.

POPE.

THE reader must not suppose, because he is yet uninformed upon the subject, that Lord Weybridge really quitted Binford without having had his intended conversation with the Rector on the topic which, after all, was nearest his heart. He had, on the contrary, availed himself of the first favourable opportunity which their association on matters of business afforded, to open the matter to him, by deplored deeply the tone and character of his daughter's letter, which he felt it no breach of confidence to mention to her father, under the circumstances, and which he seriously apprehended had been intended, as it was calculated, to put a final termination to all his hopes regarding her.

He found, as indeed he had anticipated, that Mr. Lovell was intimately acquainted with all Emma's proceedings, and to his infinite dissatisfaction also discovered that the old gentleman perfectly entered into all his daughter's feelings, and participated most unequivocally in the view which she had taken of the affair.

" My child," said the exemplary pastor, " however small her pretensions and however humble her station, possesses an inherent pride, not incompatible, I trust, with the exercise of every moral and religious duty. It is, as I need scarcely tell your lordship, neither the pride of wealth, nor the pride of birth, nor is it the still vainer pride of beauty or accomplishments, by which her actions are prompted and her conduct is regulated. It is the pride of integrity, of honour, and of truth. The sacrifices she is capable of making to filial duty and friendship you have yourself seen. Her firmness of resolution, when her determination is founded upon principle, I cannot for a moment doubt. Her delicacy has been wounded — her

feelings have been trifled with, and the dignity which she feels it due to her sex and character to maintain has been offended. She has taken her line, because she thinks it the right and just course to pursue, and I am assured, that neither your lordship's solicitations nor mine would induce her to waver in the conclusion at which she has arrived."

"But," said Lord Weybridge, "you possess a paramount power — you can command obedience."

"That power, my lord," said Lovell, "I must be pardoned for declining to use upon this occasion. In what I am saying, I speak only as a friend to both of you — I am, as you already know, informed of every thing that has passed between your lordship and my daughter — I feel honoured, as she felt gratified, by the unequivocal expression of your regard and esteem for my child, and the communication which she received from you, through her friend, Mrs. Harbottle, spoke in glowing language to our ears, the noble generosity of your character, and the unqualified sincerity of your heart. But she paused before she gave herself permission to believe in the realisation of the bright prospects your offer opened to her sight ; there *then* existed a determination on her part to decline what I believe would have constituted and secured her happiness, unless the result could have been met with the most unequivocal approbation from Lady Frances — "

"But, my dear sir," interrupted Lord Weybridge, "my mother — "

"Hear me out, my lord," said Lovell. "Without this entire concurrence, Emma never would have consented to the marriage ; I speak all this plainly and candidly, and I speak her words — *that* concurrence I believe never could have been obtained, and — "

"Yes — but — "

"One moment," said Lovell, — "that question is now at rest — the justice of my daughter's apprehensions upon that subject is proved ; for the fact is now notorious that your lordship is actually under an engagement to another lady."

"It is not so, indeed it is not," said George. "I certainly permitted my mother to open a negotiation on the

subject of marriage with Lady Catherine Hargrave, but it has gone no length — it has — ”

“ Stay, my lord,” said Lovell, somewhat indignantly, “ I must not hear this language. My child may be unprotected in the unfashionable acceptation of the word, but I cannot permit her to be so outraged as to be told that any man, whatever be his rank, has permitted a negotiation of marriage to be entered into with one lady, at a moment when he is soliciting the hand of another.”

“ I am not surprised at your anger,” said George ; “ you are not aware of the circumstances. I had heard rumours of the most extraordinary nature, connected with Mrs. Harbottle’s flight — of Emma’s participation in that flight — ”

“ And you had not sufficient reliance in *her* or me, to suspect their truth ? ”

“ Other circumstances were put in array before me — my jealousy was excited — I admit it — I felt I had been neglected, betrayed, abandoned — ”

“ In favour, perhaps, of Count Alexis Montenay ? ” said Lovell, smiling.

“ No matter,” said Lord Weybridge ; “ I was worked upon — my feelings were soured — falsehood and perversion were brought to bear upon my constancy and resolution — and I admit that I permitted, as I have already said, the subject of marriage to be mentioned to the Duchess of Malvern, but it was in a fit of madness.”

“ May I ask,” said Lovell, “ who the person is by whom all this excitement has been produced — from whom all this intelligence was derived ? ”

“ My mother told me — ”

“ Enough, enough, my dear Lord Weybridge,” said the Rector ; “ could you, if you spoke for hours, exhibit a stronger reason for Emma’s determination not to enter your family under existing circumstances, or produce a more powerful justification of the course she has resolved to pursue, than the plain simple fact that the disinclination of Lady Frances from the connexion is sufficiently inveterate to induce her to exaggerate and misrepresent circumstances and occurrences of which, in fact, she knew nothing, and

subsequently go the length of making a confidential communication to a girl with whom she never had before corresponded, announcing the death-blow to what her ladyship imagined her hopes and expectations, by proclaiming to her your approaching nuptials with Lady Catherine Hargrave?"

"But, my dear friend," said Lord Weybridge, "I am my own master — free and uncontrolled: I have admitted that doubts and fears, and even jealousies, were created in my mind. But truth, like the sun dispelling clouds, has cleared away every apprehension I entertained, and I am ready at this moment to overcome all obstacles and surmount all difficulties which may appear to present themselves, and throw myself at Emma's feet, as ardent, as sincere, and as devoted a lover as ever existed."

"I tell you plainly, Lord Weybridge," said Mr. Lovell, "your attempts to shake the resolution of my daughter will be fruitless. I will add — and here let me beg that the conversation may terminate, and that the subject may never be recurred to, in any future communication which I hope, may exist between us — that if I could believe, which I do not, that Emma's determination could be subdued, and that she were to yield to a tenderer feeling all that is dear to herself and her character, I myself should interpose my parental authority to save her from such a degradation, and if she persisted, consider her for ever lost to me: but I have that confidence in her which makes me careless of results: I know her, and I know that the strongest proof you can give of that friendship which we both of us shall continue to feel for you, will be exhibited in abstaining from any further solicitation on a subject which is henceforth eternally interdicted."

Here Lovell, much to the surprise of Lord Weybridge, who was not prepared for so decided a movement on the part of the old gentleman, rose, with an evident intention to conclude the conversation.

It was clear to George, as it must be to the reader, that both Lovell and his daughter exonerated him from blame in the affair — that they both felt conscious of the extraordinary influence Lady Frances possessed over her son,

and while they could not but despise the meannesses of which she had been guilty during the progress of her manœuvrings, they saw, in her resolution to thwart the union of the lovers, the seeds of future misery to both of them, if they should either out-general her ladyship in strategy, or declare open hostility and marry in spite of her.

This dialogue Lord Weybridge related, as nearly as he could remember it, to MacGopus, on the road homewards.

" You had better have let it alone," said MacGopus ; " your mother's letter to the girl shews what she thinks of the other affair : take my advice, marry the Duchess's daughter, and have done with it."

" Not I."

" You must."

" Who is to force me ?"

" The prejudices and customs of society," said the doctor ; " if those don't answer, there's her brother the young duke : if that does not drive you into it, there's an action at law."

" Absurd," said George, " as if a daughter of the Duchess of Malvern would hunt a husband through Westminster Hall."

" A duchess may do worse than *that*," said MacGopus ; " you are pledged, so there's an end : besides, your quiet rural beauty won't have you — you are rejected — discarded : I think my Lady Frances would go crazy if she knew of that."

" I am crazy myself," said Lord Weybridge, " and was more crazy still when I permitted her to negotiate."

" Crazy ? — hazy you mean," said his comforter.

This sort of sneer brought on one of their ordinary quarrels, and the rest of the journey was made up of a sort of April conversation, alternately storm and sunshine, till at length they found themselves deposited in safety at Severn Stoke.

In the mean time Emma had reached Mopeham, and was again in the society of her afflicted friend. But how differently circumstanced from what she had been when

she was last domesticated with her ! Then she felt, amidst her sorrow and sympathy, an apprehension which she dared not cherish, and a dread which she could not entirely overcome. Now, all the horrid mystery had been cleared up, and Fanny stood exonerated from every imputation.

It mattered, however, little to the poor suffering object of Miss Lovell's solicitude. The first dreadful incident, involving, as it did, the death of one whom she truly esteemed, and the barbarity of another, whom it was her duty to love, had produced a violent shock upon her nerves, and, indeed, upon her constitution generally. The sudden change from a life of careless gaiety and constant pleasurable excitement to a mere existence of dullness and quietude, unbroken and unmitigated, added to the effect produced by the catastrophe which had driven her from her home, and those acted upon again by the unexpected demise of her husband, parted from her, and anxious, yet unable, to see her once before his eyes closed for ever, had been too much for her ; and when Miss Lovell reached her bed-side, she was barely conscious of her approach and presence ; a restless languor had entirely overcome her, and she felt wholly unequal to follow the advice of her physicians to try the effect of sea-air and sea-bathing. Never was being so sunk — so wasted — so exhausted.

After a short period, and when she became assured of Miss Lovell's presence, she appeared to recover a little ; but it appeared to Emma that her memory was confused, that her mind was affected, and it was with difficulty the affectionate girl could sufficiently command her feelings to take part in what could scarcely be called a conversation, but in answering Fanny's questions, which were not unfrequently incoherent and even frivolous.

She, however, evidently improved in the course of a few days, but not sufficiently to speak upon general topics. Almost all she said related to her late husband, and Harvey, and Binford. Her heart and thoughts seemed settled there ; and she talked of her home incessantly, expressing at the same time the most decided repugnance to

seeing it again, or any object which she could with possibility associate with it in her mind.

In the course of three weeks after the death of the squire, the sale of the house and furniture, library, plate, pictures, wines, horses, carriages, &c. took place, and Binford became for three days the centre of gaiety. It was a melancholy sight, however, for those who had feasted and revelled under the once hospitable roof, to see the crowds of dirty, callous, calculating bidders and purchasers tumbling over the beds and curtains, and poising the spoons, and measuring the glasses, criticising this thing, and ridiculing that, and trampling down with reckless indifference the once gay parterres in which poor Fanny took such delight ; and to witness the anxiety of the brokers and the dealers, and the free-and-easy independence of the bakers and butchers of the place, seated in the luxurious chairs of their once affluent landlord and customer, scrambling for lots of small matters, in order to be enabled to say they had bought something at the sale ; while Harbottle's favourite dog — to whom, next to his wife, he had been more attached than to any living thing — was running in and out, and up stairs and down stairs, and in every room, and every passage, whining and crying, and in search of his dead master.

It was sad to see : but the results, financially speaking, were most satisfactory. Every thing fetched enormous prices, and the proceeds of the sale of the house, estate, and furniture made a noble addition to the funded property of the unhappy and almost unconscious widow.

Emma, who was convinced that Fanny ought to obey the injunctions of her medical men, pressed her to make an effort to reach the sea, which a journey of less than forty miles from Mopeham would effect ; for not only did she think change of air would be beneficial, but she felt quite assured that change of scene and of society would be of great advantage to her. At length her persuasions were successful : and Mrs. Harbottle agreed to undertake the removal by easy stages on one condition — that Mr. Lovell should join them, and continue with them during the winter and spring.

Lovell conscientiously resided almost constantly on his living ; but as he had, in other years, made it a rule generally to visit the metropolis in May or June, he could not very well resist the invitation which the lady sent him, not more from a love of his society, and a wish to have such a person near her, than from the certainty that Emma's separation from him was most painful. This last part of the consideration had its effect, and rendered him much more willing to fall into her views than he might otherwise have been ; and accordingly he resolved upon joining them at Mopeham, thence to proceed to such town at the sea-side as she might suggest or the physicians recommend.

Circumstances so far coincided agreeably, that he was enabled to wind up all the affairs at Binford before his departure, so as to make a report to the widow of his executorship as far as matters had gone. She on the other hand expressed in a letter, which she partly wrote to the Rector, a great anxiety to see him, and concluded by expressing great doubts, if he did not speedily arrive, that she should ever have that great gratification. The ravages which the sorrows of a few weeks had made, were indeed most surprising ; but the tone of her mind improved considerably after Emma's arrival, and she looked forward with great hopes to her resuscitation in her new residence.

This plan was extremely agreeable to all parties ; and Emma, who, in the struggle to enliven her friend had no little difficulty in contending with her own feelings, felt greatly relieved by not immediately returning to the Rectory, where the events which had occurred since Lord Weybridge's last visit would be constantly kept in her mind by the surrounding objects.

Fanny could not quite agree with Emma on the very decided line she had taken with regard to George. She could not but be aware that the first circumstance which at all shook his fidelity, or induced him to waver in his constancy, was the journey which Emma had taken for her sake, and it was a delicate subject for her to touch upon, feeling as she did how very much she owed to the friendship of her companion.

"Yes; but," said Emma, in reply to some observations on this point, "a man who loves a woman sufficiently to propose to make her his wife, should surely have sufficient confidence in her to believe her innocent until she is proved guilty. I certainly acquit George of the whole fault, because I know the powerful influence his mother has over him; and I know, as I have told you fifty times, how incessantly and systematically she has exerted it on this particular subject."

"But, my dear Emma," said Mrs. Harbottle, "Lord Weybridge is surely capable of judging for himself."

"So you have said before," replied Miss Lovell; "but if a man has such reliance in another's judgment, and such a respect for the opinion of that other, what signifies his age or competence to judge for himself? However, all *my* prayers are for his happiness. I am sure that his real feelings towards me are not altered—he has suffered himself to be worked upon by misrepresentations, and assertions, and calumnies."

"Of which, dear girl," said Fanny, "I have been the unhappy cause. Yes, Emma, it is too true—I feel it—I think of it by day and by night—but repentance and regret, however natural, cannot alter the course of circumstances. I consider myself the destroyer of your happiness, and the cause of all your misery: for this fault—not intentional either—I can never make you reparation."

"You must not talk thus," said Emma; "believe me, truly, I am not unhappy. I live upon the hope and expectation of seeing those whom I love and esteem happier than I could have made them; and as to my conduct with respect to yourself, which appeared so equivocal, and to which, as my father tells me in his letter, George attributes the first failure of his implicit confidence in me—although it is the ostensible, the tangible point, upon which we are separated—I solemnly declare to you, as my father knows, that no power on earth would have induced me to marry him unless with the free, full, and entire consent of Lady Frances. Under any other circumstances, both our lives would have been lives of misery; and it was not less with a view of securing his happiness than preserving my own

that I came to that resolution long before I quitted Binford with you."

" You are a kind, considerate girl, Emma," said Mrs. Harbottle ; " but I never can believe that if he had not been drawn into conduct which, in my view, nothing can possibly justify, arising from that unlucky journey, you would have had cruelty enough to refuse him."

" It would have been just and right, and wise and prudent," said Emma.

" Yes," said Fanny, " but I remember the time when wisdom and prudence were not considered the most striking characteristics of love."

" I will not argue with you upon this matter as one of feeling," said Emma ; " I *have* decided — it is therefore now my duty to overcome the sentiment I once delighted to cherish ; and thus, being no longer in love, as you call it, I may, without any great inconsistency, be both prudent and wise. All I entreat of you is not to agitate or worry yourself by any reflections on what has happened, as far as I am personally concerned."

It was in vain for Emma to endeavour thus to sooth her friend. She was assured of Lord Weybridge's attachment — of his devotion to her ; and, however powerful his mother's influence might be, she was convinced that if she herself had not unfortunately afforded her a ground to work upon, the dislike to the connection would have been conceded to her son's representations, and that Miss Lovell would have become Lady Weybridge : a circumstance of the occurrence of which there did not now appear to be the shadow of a possibility.

As we have elsewhere to go, in order to watch the proceedings of the noble baron, at his place in Worcestershire, we had better dispose of the Rectory party before we take our departure for Severn Stoke. Mr. Lovell, in about a week after the sale, arrived at Mopeham, and all the necessary arrangements having been made, it was settled that he and Emma should proceed to the place which Fanny had selected for her retreat ; and, having in some degree established themselves there, she was to follow.

This order of march appeared, both to Lovell and his

daughter, strange, and neither of them could exactly understand what Fanny's intention could be in thus dividing their forces. But she remained positive upon the point, and of course there was no resisting her reason, at least that which she assigned — namely, that they would be enabled to judge of the accommodations which might be available, and that she could at once proceed to the house that might be taken, without the necessity of staying previously at an inn, or of moving about after she had once reached her place of destination.

That she had another motive, the reader will perhaps hereafter discover ; be that as it may, their progress was regulated according to her directions, and the Rector and his daughter, in one of the carriages, with two of Mrs. Harbottle's servants and Emma's maid, proceeded to the sequestered and romantic town of Minehead, Mrs. Harbottle having been recommended to the air of that side of the Bristol Channel in preference to the milder and more relaxing climate of the western and southern coast of Devonshire, to which she at first purposed going.

The feeling which Mrs. Harbottle appeared to entertain towards the Rector was more closely allied to that which a daughter entertains towards a father than any other. She felt how much she owed him, and reposed a confidence in him, which, strange as it may sound, she had never felt disposed to place in her husband. The gentle and refined manners of Lovell, subdued and tempered by age, and a knowledge of the world and its ways, soothed her sorrows and gained her affection ; and it is, perhaps, no discredit to her to say, considering how she had gained and how she lost her husband, that the peaceful quietude of her present life, passed in the society of such estimable companions, had a tranquillising effect upon her mind, which that excellent man took advantage of, to lead her thoughts to worthier and more exalted subjects than perhaps she had been sufficiently in the habit of considering ; and profiting by the occasion, without either forcing her inclinations, or appearing to regulate her pursuits, prepared her, imperceptibly, for the awful change, which, from the moment

he first saw her at Mopeham, he was convinced she was at no great distance of time destined to undergo.

The accommodations at Minehead, romantic and beautiful as is the neighbourhood, were scarcely adequate to the demands of the visitors, and it was not until after two or three days' management, during which Lovell and his daughter were lodged at the Feathers Inn, that any arrangement, with a prospect of comfort, could be made. At length two houses were secured, which, adjoining as they did, were capable of being united in one ; and there, with a fine view of the Bristol Channel and the opposite Welsh coast before their windows, the Rector and his child erected their standard, despatching one of Mrs. Harbottle's servants to announce the result of their inquiries, and to pilot the main body of the establishment to their quiet retirement.

In three or four days Fanny arrived and joined them, but so much exhausted by the effort, that it was not without the greatest alarm and anxiety Lovell insisted upon calling in the Paracelsus of the place, in combination with the Galen of Dunster, who agreed — as doctors are not always said to do — upon the absolute necessity of the patient's being kept perfectly quiet, enjoying as much as possible the sea air, and divesting her mind of every thing like care or anxiety.

How easy it is for doctors to prescribe !

CHAPTER VI.

— Around
The boat, light skimming, stretch'd its oary wings ;
While deep the various voice of fervent toil
From bank to bank increas'd, whence, ribbed with oak,
To bear the British thunder, black and bold,
The roaring vessel rush'd into the main.

THOMSON.

THE three weeks which had been occupied by the party in settling themselves at Minehead had been passed at Severn-

stoke in a very different manner. In the one place all that had been done had been regulated by an unqualified desire for peace and quietude ; at the other, truth to be told, bickerings, anger, and jealousies were in constant operation ; and it was with the greatest difficulty that Lady Frances, by dint of continued contrivances, managed to keep the Duchess and her daughter in ignorance of the rooted disinclination of George from the match — because she felt sure that their pride would instantly have fired at the notion of any thing like doubt or hesitation on the part of their noble host ; notwithstanding which, it may be as well to observe, that the determination of her Grace to make Catherine Lady Weybridge before she had done, was so marvellously strong as to close her eyes and ears against much, which, with the aid of a running commentary on the part of Doctor MacGopus, must otherwise have opened them to the real state of the case : but, as the proverb says, “none are so blind as those who wont see,” and to use a very homely expression with reference to so very fine a lady, her Grace during the last fortnight had pocketed several affronts, which, in a less worthy cause, she neither could have been prevailed upon to overlook nor forgive.

George fought off his mother with great ingenuity, and argued upon the indelicacy of forcing on any thing like a marriage so shortly after the death of his relations.

“ My dear child,” said Lady Frances, “ this is all false delicacy, and a punctilioousness now exploded. If a death happens in a family, in these days nobody stays at home but the deceased. What were these people to *you*? by blood, relations I admit — but you had no ties to them of affection or friendship ; you never associated with them, and they are gone.”

“ True,” said George, “ they are gone — and so, we are here — but still it seems to me, as if ‘ the funeral baked meats would coldly furnish forth the marriage tables ;’ and I think a somewhat longer pause between the events might seem more decent to the world.”

“ To this,” said Lady Frances, “ I can have no objection, provided you so conclude the affair that it may be talked of — promised — expected ; and that the pledge

which, in your name, I have given to Catherine, may be redeemed."

"I gave no pledge," said George.

"Forgive me, George," said his mother; "I have your own friend for my witness: you commissioned me to make the offer — I lost no time in doing so, and had you not been called away by the death of that horrid man (whose face I wish with all my heart I had never seen), that day would have concluded the preliminaries. As things unfortunately turned out, you have been removed from an association with a being who loves you, to the influence of a faction — a *clique*, who wish to secure you for the mere sake of rank and connection; and you return from their society labouring under the effect of misrepresentations which have been imposed upon you by the artful pretender to a rank she would disgrace, and the anxious coveter of a fortune she would abuse."

"Mother," said Lord Weybridge, "praise Catherine as much as she deserves; she is fair, accomplished, amiable, and agreeable — of high blood and noble lineage — admitted; but do not, in endeavouring to exalt *her*, attempt to debase a being of whom you literally know nothing. Your only chance of obtaining my consent to make this very noble alliance, upon which you have fixed your heart, arises from the avowed resolution of this adventurer, this ravenous seeker of place and fortune, never to see me more."

"Ridiculous," said Lady Frances.

"Yourself shall see the proof," said George: "this plain and humble, unsophisticated Parson's Daughter rejects me — spurns me — banishes me from her presence — forbids my pursuit of her; and your excellent and accomplished son, the idol of your heart, and the much desired of her Grace the Duchess of Malvern and her right honourable daughter, is cast off as unworthy the notice of this envious, ambitious plebeian."

"You surprise me."

"I tell you truth," said George; "and her father seconds all her determinations upon the subject. She abandons me eternally, and he applauds the decision."

"The man is wiser than I took him for," said Lady Frances.

"And the girl — ?" said George.

"A greater fool than I imagined," replied her ladyship; "however, I presume you are not of a temper to bear an insult like this. You have the spirit of a mouse, I conclude—or of a worm: you will not be trod upon by such people as these without turning."

"I will not wound your feelings, my dear mother," said Lord Weybridge, "by going into details upon the subject. I shall content myself by telling you that I never can sincerely love any woman, as a wife ought to be loved, but Emma Lovell. How this wide difference has arisen between us, I leave to those who are adepts in making mischief, to determine: their plots have been successful, and she and I are separated for ever."

"Then," said Lady Frances, "your course is so much the easier—you will not consent to wear the willow for the Parson's Daughter, or let the recollection of her inoffensive mediocrity weigh in the scale against the claims and qualities of Lady Catherine?"

"Let me beg of you not to institute comparisons," said George; "they are always invidious, and must be unjust to one of the parties. I tell you I have not a word to say against Lady Catherine: and if, as I sincerely believe to be the case, Emma has finally discarded me—and if it is shewn that I must, unwillingly I confess, and most assuredly under the influence of false reports, marry another person, I have no greater objection to marrying Lady Catherine than any body else; but with feelings of such a nature I must have time to make up my mind to a step so decisive as that which you call upon me to take."

"And how am I to amuse her with hopes, or lull her into patience?" said her ladyship; "every day I expect the Duchess herself, to speak to you on the subject."

"If she does, I shall tell her Grace the truth," said George.

"Then she will snatch up her daughter and fly."

"If I were quite sure of that," said George, "my ve-

racity in the description of my sentiments would be most rigidly correct."

"You are incorrigible, George," said Lady Frances; "for now, even upon your own shewing, I see no reason for your coldness and hesitation. Admit that you did admire this Parson's Daughter, you yourself allow that that affair is all over—I conclude you are not going to stoop to intreat and implore."

"Indeed *I* am not," said George, "because I know it would be all in vain; but this I know, that I am not able to command my feelings or dictate to my heart as I may be imagined to command my ship or order my crew. It requires time to obliterate, or rather sufficiently to weaken, such an impression as Miss Lovell has made upon me, to endure such a proposition as that which you think proper to make. I honestly and fairly tell you I never can love as I ought to love, the woman I may be married to, Emma not being that person. Surely then it is only just and reasonable to let the poignant disappointment which oversets me at present wear off in some degree, before I am called upon to fulfil an engagement into which I entered, if indeed I entered into it at all, in the full conviction that the being to whom I was entirely devoted had forfeited all claim to my esteem and affection, and had not only most imprudently committed herself in the flight of a runaway wife, but had subsequently entered into a new engagement with a Frenchman."

"Which Frenchman," said Lady Frances —

"Turns out, as I wrote you word, to be a child of nine years old, now gone to school for the first time in his short life."

"Well then, George," said Lady Frances, "you shall neither be hurried nor worried — you must see how very much attached Catherine is to you; do be good-natured and lively — and kind — and speak to her and the Duchess — and do what she wishes about sitting for your picture — she paints admirably — and there are several of her likenesses excellent — sit to her as she begged you yesterday — it will make so good a plea for two or three hours' conversation — and she will delight in it so."

"I have no objection," said his Lordship, "if I may have MacGopus in the room."

"My dear George, what on earth for?" said Lady Frances — "she is frightened to death at your Doctor — whom she calls 'your pet' — and so am I: to tell you the truth, I do not think he improves upon acquaintance."

"He comes out with some ugly truths now and then," said George; "but they cannot be disagreeable to such spotless angels as the Duchess and her daughter."

"Well, and then, George, there is another point upon which I wish to speak," said Lady Frances.

"Proceed, madam," said her son.

"I do think you ought to cultivate your neighbours more than you do," said Lady Frances; "you see everybody has been here — I have driven half over the country to leave your tickets; but that is not enough, you have evaded several invitations on a plea of business and so on, but I think you ought to give one or two parties."

"I still plead the brevity of our mourning," said George.

"Indeed there is nothing in that," replied Lady Frances; "I was talking to the Duchess about it, and she quite agrees with me. It is right to form connections and support interests; and, both as a matter of private convenience and public advantage, we think that bringing your neighbours round you will be of infinite service, morally and politically."

"For the moral part of the affair I grant you," said George, "but for the political utility of it, the day is over — the course which public affairs are taking will, in three or four years from this time, neutralise all the powers of the aristocracy, and all the distinctions which have hitherto existed between the peer and his dependants will be cancelled. I should be glad to stand well with my neighbours; and, therefore, if you have satisfied yourself that we have done all that decency requires in so long abstaining from gaiety or mirth, let us have some parties, let us bring the county together; only, if I could, I would rather consult my *homme d'affaires* here, in making out the lists of invitations, so as not to bring together clashing factions, or pit foe against foe at the dinner table."

"And let there be something like a ball in the evening,"

said Lady Frances ; "nothing is so gratifying to foolish people as dancing — they are pleased with themselves, and pleased with their partners, and they are pleased with the animal exercise ; and the small mental exertion required to jump and shuffle about a room just suits the ordinary run of people, and we will give them plenty of supper and oceans of champagne, and make them as happy as the season requires."

"Agreed," said George ; "it shall be done."

"And, George, you *will* sit for your likeness to Catherine," said Lady Frances.

"Whatever you wish shall be executed, my dear mother," replied his lordship, who readily caught at any thing which he fancied likely to occupy his attention, and keep his thoughts from straying to his obdurate Emma.

The portrait-painting scheme her ladyship considered excellent ; it would associate George and Catherine together morning after morning ; and, as for the skill of the amateur artist, she troubled her head little about that, so as she could complete the family picture which she herself had so anxiously designed.

Amongst the other changes which had taken place in her ladyship's feelings, she had conceived an inveterate hatred for MacGopus, upon whom she looked as the confidant of George in the Binford affair, and to whose counsel she attributed much of his lordship's too evident coldness and indifference towards Lady Catherine. She knew, however, she could not succeed in detaching her son from his ancient friend ; and, therefore, she impressed upon his mind the propriety of assembling larger parties at Severn Stoke, in order, as she hoped, to drive away the Doctor, who was continually expressing his love of snugness and a select circle. This was one of her objects in suggesting an influx of company ; and another hope which she had in reserve, even if that scheme failed of success to its fullest extent, was, that the change of society, and the introduction of new visitors, might divert George from the contemplation of his unfortunate attachment, and rescue him from his protracted after-dinner conversations with his influential adviser. Thus will be seen her ladyship's motives for

changing her policy, and for advocating parties not resident in the house, so as not to interfere with the morning avocations of George and the bride elect ; but so contrived as to enliven him in the evening, to raise his spirits, to amuse his mind, and to render the repose of the next morning's "sitting" a relief after the excitement of the preceding night.

Accordingly, the picture scheme was forwarded with laudable activity. — Canvass stretched, and colours ready, with palettes, palette-knives, bottles, bags, oil, and brushes, speedily arrived from London, to furnish the means for the mornings' avocations. — While, in order to give *éclat* to the parties, the family plate, new polished and burnished, was conveyed to Severn Stoke in charge of a couple of *attachés* to Messrs. Rundell and Bridge ; the rooms, which had been newly furnished, were completed — the curtains were put up — the carpets laid down — furniture of the most elegant and novel description, selected under the classical eye of Lady Frances, crowded the suite of apartments, and the seat of the Sheringhams looked as it had never yet looked since it was built.

George, it must be admitted, took little if any pleasure in these magnificent proceedings ; and it appeared to his anxious parent that, in proportion as the place became gayer and more splendid, he grew more melancholy and abstracted — a circumstance which did not escape the notice of the Duchess, and had excited the remarks of her daughter ; but Lady Frances satisfactorily accounted for the depression of his spirits, by attributing it to the shock he had received by the sudden and terrible death of Har-bottle, connected as it was with the destruction of his amiable friend Harvey. It was not in his nature to be unkind, and therefore his manner towards Lady Catherine was all gentleness and good nature. — The total absence of any thing like enthusiasm, his sullen silence upon the subject most natural to be spoken of under these circumstances, Lady Catherine attributed to the general want of sentiment now so observable in all such matters ; and she saw, in his careful avoidance of what used to be called love-making, nothing beyond a desire to steer clear of the charge of romanticism, which would infallibly attach to any man

who, in these enlightened days, might be detected in the expression of a feeling which, in other times, it was the lover's glory to admit.

The age of sentiment is past — the world is much too wise to encourage any thing so childish ; and the same enlightenment which is destined to level all distinctions, and throw down all barriers in the political world, has opened the eyes of hitherto deluded lovers to the folly of feeling and the absurdity of tenderness.

Lady Catherine neither expected what she considered the mawkish, whining, schoolboy solicitude, nor the unvarying, shadow-like attendance upon her, such as ladies of other times required of their cavaliers. Like her mother, Lady Catherine admired Severn Stoke and Grosvenor Square — had no objection to a baronial coronet, nor to an income of thirty or forty thousand pounds a year ; with these she had no objection to take George Sheringham. It was not that she was mercenary, neither would she have linked herself to age or decrepitude for the sake of wealth or rank, nor would she have done a violence to her feelings by marrying in any way against her inclinations ; but she liked Lord Weybridge, and had liked him before he was Lord Weybridge — that is to say, she liked his conversation — was pleased in his society — and perhaps liked it better, because at that period George, from not being considered an eligible *parti* for her, had been, as we already know, driven away from her, and she kept away from him. At present she felt, by the assurances of both mothers, that, whatever appearances might be, she was the affianced wife of Lord Weybridge ; and, although her consent had never been formally asked by him, it had been, as she felt, tacitly given by herself ; and so she went on, satisfied how the affair must end, and that she should marry a very agreeable man, with a very pretty sounding title, and a very handsome property ; and that, all things suiting, they should make a very happy couple, and on the whole they should do extremely well.

" MacGopus," said Lord Weybridge, " I have done something to-day that will make you stare."

"Not it," said the Doctor; "I am surprised at nothing; now-a-days."

"I have written to London ——"

"For a license to be married."

"No, upon a totally different subject. You will promise not to betray me to my mother?"

"Not I," said MacGopus.

"You will think me mad, I dare say," said George, "and I believe I am so; but I have done it — I have written to the Admiralty to be employed."

"What!" exclaimed MacGopus, opening his eyes to their greatest width ——

"I have," said Lord Weybridge. "A ship would relieve me from my difficulties — time would change all these things. I should like to get my post rank, and take three years' swing in a frigate."

"Mad, if ever any man was mad in this world," said the Doctor.

"I shall be driven mad if I stay here," said Lord Weybridge. I have tried every effort to rally — I have endeavoured to act as my mother wishes, and as you have taught me to believe I ought to act; but the impression which has been made upon me is not to be effaced, and I can fight up against it no longer."

"What good will the ship do?" said the Doctor.

"Take me from all this entanglement, and leave me at liberty for the term of my command," said George.

"I should think," said MacGopus, "that, instead of a commission for a frigate, the government would suggest a commission of lunacy. Give up all your comforts — your splendour — your ease — and what might be your happiness — for a ship!"

"D'y'e think I shall get one?" said George, who was most anxious in his inquiry upon the subject.

"Leave the government your proxy, and see," said the Doctor.

"I have no politics; my mind is too much occupied by my own misfortunes to allow me leisure to think of any thing else."

"Exactly so," said the Doctor, "and that's the very

reason why you should leave your proxy with the minister. Delegate your power to *him*, and he will save you all the trouble of thinking."

" Well, now, MacGopus," said Lord Weybridge, " keep this measure of mine from my mother. If I obtain the ship, it will be a call to service. She knows me well enough to know that such a call no power would induce me to disregard. What I ask is, never undeceive her as to the manner it was obtained."

" I see no good in it," said the Doctor; " you must marry before you go — even supposing you do go."

" Most assuredly not," said George; " that would be an absurdity upon the face of it. Marry only to part — no — my pledge remains, if pledge it is; and when I return — if I return — if Lady Catherine has patience to wait that event — I shall be able to redeem it, at least more philosophically than I can do so now."

" All mad, wild-goose nonsense," said MacGopus. " It is not a question of her waiting or not; you cannot get off the match, and I repeat my opinion, that, if even you get the ship, you must marry her before you go."

" Leave that to me," said Lord Weybridge. " I could not conceal what I had done from you, although I resolved to do it without consulting you, that you might not be involved in any responsibility as to the consequences. All I ask is secrecy."

" I can hold my tongue," said MacGopus; " it would have been as well if everybody else had done the same. I presume — if I may be permitted through your interest to serve in a small craft — am I to go afloat with you?"

" Serve or not, you shall go," said George. " I shall be too happy to consider you my friend upon the cruise."

" Ah!" said the Doctor, " it may keep you out of scrapes to have me to vent your ill humours upon."

" I think the step I have taken a wise one."

" On the contrary, the height of folly; but 'tis of no use talking — we have only to wait the answer. Come, my lord, it is time you should go and sit for your picture," said the Doctor. " We'll talk of this another time — a ship!"

"Was there ever any thing so absurd?" said Lord Weybridge; "without a master at her elbow, Lady Catherine has just as much notion of painting as I have. I don't like to object to the ceremony; but the thing is as much like me as Julius Cæsar."

"I think 't is a remarkably good likeness," said the Doctor.

"Well, I hope she will please herself with the resemblance; it may serve her to contemplate till my return."

"You 'll never go," said the Doctor.

"We shall see; I again enjoin you to secrecy as to my application — leave the rest to me."

"All I say is, marry her you must before you start; it will be just as well to let the repugnance wear off after you are married, as to delay; for you'll never be received again by that Miss —"

"Lovell."

"Never," said the Doctor; "so between the two you are agreeably placed. Please your mother by marrying Lady Catherine first, and then please yourself by going to sea — you 'll follow your own vagary — fulfil your engagements, get leave of absence, and give the young woman the chance of becoming a rich and handsome widow."

At this period of the conversation, a summons from Lady Catherine separated the disputants, and the Doctor proceeded to the library to read away the morning, while the noble lord resumed his seat in an armed chair, hoisted upon a table, in a half-darkened drawing-room, which had been expressly converted into a *studio* for the noble and accomplished amateur.

Lord Weybridge, however, was destined to suffer annoyances besides those which more particularly applied to himself. His peculiar connexion with Lovell in the Harbottle executorship rendered a continual correspondence between them necessary, and every letter he received from the Rector — all on pure business, in which not one syllable respecting Emma was mentioned — renewed his griefs, refreshed his recollections, and completely overset him for a day or two; and scarcely had he recovered from the agitation and seriousness to which that one had sub-

jeiced him, before another application from his colleague again tore open the yet bleeding wounds which his preceding communication had inflicted.

During the week in which he had written to the First Lord of the Admiralty — at that period young in office, and naturally anxious to strengthen a very questionable ministry by all the support he could collect — he had received a most melancholy account from Minehead. Lovell represented the state of Mrs. Harbottle's health to be, as the local physicians considered it, most precarious. They had, by desire of the medical men on the spot, sent to London for the first of the faculty, who had, at great inconvenience, visited her. His advice, and the opinion he privately expressed to Lovell, induced him to apprehend the very worst consequences.

"Poor soul," said Lovell, in his letter, "she has fallen into a state — not of unconsciousness or insensibility — but of languor, from which she endeavours to rouse herself, but in vain, and I fear that symptoms of consumption are shewing themselves ; the physicians have ordered our changing our position, and removing to the westernmost point of Devonshire. This is in direct opposition to the views and wishes which were expressed when we first took up our abode in this quiet and romantic corner, and she has evinced a strong aversion from moving at all : we must, I conclude, obey our orders, and use a gentle force to put them into execution.

"She begs me to remember her most kindly to your lordship, and bitterly regrets that circumstances prevent her having the pleasure of occasionally seeing you. She expresses a strong desire and even a resolution to write to you, upon some point which she admits to be deeply interesting to herself, but which she strenuously declines confiding to us. She is at present forbidden to write or read, and it is but for a short period of the day that she is sufficiently composed to allow herself to be read to.

"Certainly, if any thing were wanting to convince us poor mortals of the frailty and insignificance of worldly advantages, the havoc which a few weeks have produced in her family would afford a most striking and melancholy

example. I declare to your lordship my conviction, that, before two months have elapsed, she will have left us for ever, as far as this life is concerned.

" There is a point of great delicacy connected with her precarious situation, upon which it is impossible for me to touch, and yet it is one of so much importance that it is almost criminal not to call her attention to it. I mean the disposition of her vast property. Her nearest and only relation of whom I have ever heard her speak is her aunt Jarman, at Mopeham ; and it now appears that Mr. Harbottle himself was a natural and only son, and that his mother has long since been dead. I have no reason whatever to believe that Mrs. Harbottle has made any will, nor can I venture, in her present state of mind, to say a word upon the subject. Indeed, I doubt at this moment, whether she is even aware of the extent of her fortune — she evinces a total indifference towards every thing connected with such matters, and whatever is necessary to be done for carrying on the establishment, she has commissioned me to do, and has delegated to me the power of drawing upon a considerable sum which she has deposited in one of the Taunton banks.

" When that sum was paid into Kinglake's house I am not aware, for I have not been over to Taunton since our arrival here. I was surprised at the precaution and activity of the measure ; but I conclude the arrangement was made by her banker when she was at Mopeham. Thus, you see, I have become a sort of steward to the widow, and I feel myself bound to devote my care and attention to her who is, for her standing and rank in society, more isolated and alone in the world than any human being I ever met with. I should be in better spirits if I could hope my stewardship might exist for a much longer period than I expect it will.

" I have sometimes fancied that the letter which she expresses a wish to write to you might contain some information or wish upon this important subject, and if I can, with safety to her health, encourage her disposition to make such a communication, I shall feel it my duty to do so. I have had very satisfactory accounts from the

solicitors, and the banking-house in London, as to the investment of the proceeds of the sale of the Binford property ; but I feel some degree of nervousness at finding myself the sole manager of concerns not exactly adapted to my time of life, or in accordance with my professional avocations. However, to do our duty must be our first effort, and, since your lordship's manifold engagements in the gay and busy world would be greatly interfered with by a closer attention to the minutiae of our trust, I am too happy to devote as much of my time as I can spare from graver occupations to the regulation of the ill-fated widow's affairs.

"I would venture, however, to suggest to your lordship, that, in the next letter with which you honour me, you might enclose a short note to her — not, of course, pointedly alluding to matters of business, and least of all to the particular business which appears of the first importance, but calculated to excite her to a reply. It is clear to me that she has something on her mind which she desires to communicate to you specially — but, as I have already said, I fear to argue the point, and should rejoice if she should voluntarily undertake to answer a letter from you, which, from the extremely high terms in which she always speaks of your lordship, I really think she would be very much pleased to receive."

Lord Weybridge read the letter from which these passages are extracted with eager anxiety, from the first to the last line, in the hope that Emma's name might once occur — but no, the usual silence was preserved ; and although it appeared almost impossible, associated as she and Fanny were, to descant upon the sorrows and sickness of the one, without, in some degree, alluding to the sympathy and attentions of the other, — so it was — the resolution, never to hear from or to be heard of by George, remained unbroken and unaltered, and the absence of the one magic word from the Rector's epistle cast an unmitigated gloom over the whole of it.

It was evident to George that poor Fanny was dying — it was admitted by the Rector that she expressed the warmest regard for him, and the highest opinion of him.

To whom did she express these feelings and sentiments? — the inference was conclusive — to Emma and her father: — still then she was his friend, nor would she have indulged in such a strain if she believed it unpleasant to her dear and faithful companion. The business in question, of the will, he did not see how he could interfere about: but upon other grounds he saw good reasons for complying with Lovell's wish that he should write to her; yes — he would write such a letter as she might show Emma — or perhaps Emma would be commissioned to read it to her: — and yet what dare he say? — she had insisted upon his silence — he too was now doubly entangled — if he got his ship and saved himself, for the present, from marrying Lady Catherine, he would, by the same measure, be taken away from the possibility of any farther negotiation with the Lovells.

No man who has not been in a situation somewhat similar to that of our gallant hero, can picture to himself the state of his mind and feelings at this critical period — nor were his agitation and perturbation at all calmed by the announcement, from his lady-mother, that sixteen friends had already accepted the dinner invitation at Severnstroke for the following Friday, and that one hundred and seventy-four cards were out for the evening of the same day.

As for her ladyship, she was now in her element; — for Mrs. Harbottle she cared little for her illness or her sorrows — she was associated so entirely in her mind with the bane of her existence, the unoffending Emma, that even the afflictions of the one and the magnanimous conduct of the other failed to overcome the prejudice she had taken against the whole Binsford *clique*; therefore did she delight when she found herself, for the first time in her life, able to direct fêtes and entertainments upon a great scale, and permit her taste and fancy to luxuriate in the decorations of a fine house upon the occasion of a reunion of all the grace, and wealth, and beauty of the surrounding country.

It was, moreover, edifying to observe how her ladyship, in all her orderings and countermandings, appeared to refer to Lady Catherine, always taking her ladyship as her

companion and counsellor in the different directions she was giving : — “Don’t you think, dear Catherine, that will look best ? ” — “How would you have it done, my love ? ” and half a thousand other expressions of similar import, all tending to impress upon the young lady’s mind that she, as mother of the noble lord, was only rehearsing, for her daughter-in-law’s instruction, that which she expected her to perform as his lordship’s wife.

And, to be candid, Lady Frances had a great deal of taste — she could not certainly claim the merit of first introducing live fish into a drawing-room, nor appropriate to herself the beautiful design of hiding lights in garlands of flowers ; but she did her best to emulate those who struck out such novelties, and now that the means were afforded her, her genius shone forth.

The filial attention of George to his mother was exemplary ; and as her influence over him was, in fact, unbounded, however free he fancied himself, so his gratitude for all her devotion to him in his early youth manifested itself upon his accession to fortune. On her birth-day he presented her with a magnificent set of diamonds, such as he had heard her admire in others. The family jewels, were, with some very trifling exceptions, found at the bankers’ — those he touched not : the ornaments which he gave his mother were beautiful beyond even her hopes ; and the Duchess and her daughter sounded the praises, not only of his goodness of heart, but of the excellence of his taste, in strains which ought to have made him proudest of the proud, and vainest of the vain.

But no ! — after the two hours’ sitting, in which little enough was said as far as love went, and still less was done in the way of painting, he retired to his room to take counsel of MacGopus with respect to the letter which he had received from Lovell, and which, though it contained no actual reproach for neglect of activity as executor to Harbottle, certainly had the effect of reminding him that he had been somewhat remiss with respect to the widow.

MacGopus, of course, negatived all his lordship’s propositions, and contradicted all his assertions ; but, as something like a duty was to be done, he eventually came round

to his friend's opinion ; and, accordingly, by that day's post, Lord Weybridge wrote to the Rector, and enclosed such a letter as he conceived most likely to elicit the communication which it was thought expedient he should have with Mrs. Harbottle.

When he came to the conclusion of his epistle, he paused — hesitated — doubted — should he follow the example of Lovell? — should he utterly omit the name of Emma? — what should he do? — what ought he to do? — What will the reader think he did? — After some deliberation he folded the letter as it was — was going to seal it — had directed it ; when, opening it for one moment, he hastily added : — “ Pray remember me to Miss Lovell.”

Well ! there could be no great harm in *that*, after all.

CHAPTER VII.

— Time on *Neptune's* wings
The welcome letter brings.

Old Song.

THE post of the succeeding day brought, amongst other letters, an answer from the First Lord of the Admiralty himself, marked “ private,” in answer to George's application for a ship. It was couched in the most civil terms, and stated that, without entering into the motives which might induce Lord Weybridge to desire to be employed, the first lord had the greatest pleasure in acceding to his wishes, both as to rank and service, and that he would be posted forthwith to H. M. frigate Destructive, of forty-four guns, which they were bringing forward at Portsmouth, and which would be ready for commissioning in about ten days or a fortnight. The first lord took the occasion of expressing himself, in the civilest manner, stating that the Destructive was destined for Channel service, and that no difficulty would be interposed to a sufficient leave of ab-

sence for his lordship in February, in order to enable him to take his seat in the House of Lords about the time of the opening of Parliament.

George, when he read this letter, and found his end achieved, felt exactly like a school-boy with half a pound of gunpowder in his pocket, which he is afraid to confess that he has bought — he was quite sure that the announcement of the intelligence it contained would create a tremendous sensation in the family, and, as he always did, when he was in doubt or difficulty, he summoned his friend MacGopus into council.

The Doctor read the letter and threw it down with a sneer ; for the Doctor, generally speaking, cared little for the Admiralty, which, in those days, had not much to say to his department of the service.

" Well," said his lordship, " what's the matter ? It is very civil and complimentary ? "

" You've sold yourself to the devil," said the Doctor, " and he will have you one day or other."

" What d'ye mean ? "

" Why, that you are gagged — tongue-tied," replied MacGopus. " A compact is entered into between you and the first lord — he humours *you* — you must oblige *him*. I knew you'd get the ship — but I foresaw you would lose your independence."

" Independence !" said Lord Weybridge — " how do I compromise my independence ? I have no object to gain by truckling or creeping."

" Not now you haven't," said the Doctor, " because you have got the Destructive ; but, rely upon it, that's a bargain, and a blind bargain, and a bad bargain, and it won't save you from marrying Lady Catherine — I told you so before — I tell you so again, and I am more fully convinced than I have been yet."

" Why ? "

" The Duke, her brother, is coming here," said MacGopus.

" What the devil do I care for that ? " said his lordship ; " you don't imagine that I am to be drilled into marrying ? "

" I am firm to my text — marry her you must — your shilly-shally conduct for the last three weeks has put it out of your power to back out : if you had cut the knot the moment you came back from that place where we went to the funeral of the man who died, you might perhaps have done some such thing."

" Why, what on earth are you talking about ? " said George, " did not you yourself advise my not doing any such thing ? "

" Not I," said the Doctor ; " I told you that I thought you ought to marry the lady, and give up the Parson's Daughter — and so I think still ; but if you had not thought with me, then was your time to break off — now you cannot — and so I have told your mother."

" You have ! and pray, why ? "

" Because I am sure it is right. Why have you gone on sitting, and making that beautiful girl paint your picture, if you did not mean her to have the original ? Why do you stand leaning over her chair when she is playing on the piano-forte ? Why do you listen while she is singing ? Why do you go riding with her, and walking with her ? "

" Are these crimes in society ? " said George. " I am sure they are not. They may be amongst the Hottentots in the Highlands, or in the coteries of the New Road ; but what would you have a man do ? turn bear or boar, and treat women who happen to be in his society as if they were unworthy of his notice and attention ? "

" Quere, now," said MacGopus, " what have the Hottentots to do with the Highlands ? "

" Psha ! — imperturbable monster ! "

" Dunce," said the Doctor ; " be a man — rouse yourself — see the position in which you stand — do what is right and honourable, and you will prosper : you would have been just as well without the ship, and a good deal better without the obligation — however, that's done — she's for Channel service ; in peace time she'll serve as a yacht, and you can cruise about with your noble lady, and exhibit a splendid pair of aristocrats to the astonished multitude."

" You will drive me mad," said George ; " however,

promise me one thing — let my mother decide upon the point without influencing her — let me discuss with her the question, whether I may not postpone my marriage till the expiration of my command — that is all I ask."

"I want to influence nobody," said MacGopus, "except yourself: I should like to see you act in a manner consistent with your character, and agreeably to the right feelings of your heart — you are now playing the fool — if it were any body else, I should think trying to play the knave; all this trick about the appointment is visible to the naked eye — it's unlike you."

"That step is irrevocable," said George; "I have asked for employment, and go I will; if it will not avoid my union with a person I cannot love, it will at least rid me of all the disagreeable consequences of it."

To Lady Frances, George was at length compelled to proceed — to her, by degrees, he opened his very extraordinary communication, shaping it, however, so as to appear that he had been called upon for service. This her ladyship evidently discredited, and nothing would convince her of the reality of the appointment, but a perusal of the first lord's letter, which completely disclosed the causes and reasons of his receiving it.

"I am thunder-struck," said her ladyship; "any thing so near madness I never yet heard of: abandon your comforts — the luxuries by which you are surrounded, hearts that love you, and lips that praise you, for a paltry command in peace time — compromising, too, your parliamentary independence to a ministry just formed, and which either will not last six months, or, if it do, will destroy every thing but itself. Haven't you heard your uncle Frederick say that 'Whigs, like pigs, cut their own throats when they attempt to swim?' and, if they fail in doing that, the chances are, that more throats than their own will be cut before they have done. — Is it for this that you give up all your connexions — every tie to home, and the happiness of your domestic circle — and, above all, Catherine?"

"There you have come to the very point," said George; "do you consider that I give her up by accepting the ship?"

" Give up her society you must."

" Aye, but — I mean, shall I, in your opinion, be forced to relinquish that *very desirable* match?"

" Assuredly not."

" What must be my course?"

" Why, if you have a spark of honour in your heart — if you possess any one attribute of your family — if you are what I have fondly hoped and prayed you might be — your marriage with Lady Catherine must precede your departure."

" So MacGopus says," said George.

" And wisely and properly too," replied Lady Frances ; " you have not only permitted me to negociate the marriage, but you have, by your attentions and manner towards her, since that event, fully justified all I said. She is convinced that she is to be your wife — of course her delicacy never suffers her to make any allusion to the circumstance, and she waits with patience until you shall begin the subject. But it is understood, not only by herself and her mother, but by the whole of her family, and by her brother, who has recognised that understanding as the cause for her protracted absence from Rochdale, and her long continued visit here."

" What am I to say — how am I to act?" said Lord Weybridge. " I admit the justice of many of your observations — I admit that, in a moment of irritation, I authorised you to say more than I should even in a calmer moment have wished you to say : but when you recollect that, if I had not been suddenly called away the next morning, before I had an opportunity of explaining my meaning, I should have revoked that authority ; and when you also recollect that the excitement, under the influence of which I gave you the permission to speak to the Duchess, was created by rumours and reports, all of which have since been proved to be groundless ; and that whatever else of irritation I endured was produced by the calm and placid interruption and contradiction of your present great friend and ally, the Doctor ; I think you will make such allowances as might induce you to put an end to the affair

altogether, without the slightest imputation upon either of our characters."

"With all these causes, my dear George," said her ladyship, "Lady Catherine has no concern; and I only ask you, besides the opinion which your most extraordinary conduct with regard to her would be calculated to excite, to consider what my position is. I stand before her family in the character either of an eager and unauthorised negotiator for the hand of the young lady, or as having misrepresented altogether your views and sentiments. Ask yourself what will be thought of all this? If the young person who caught your fancy at Binford remained as ready to throw herself into your arms as she seemed to be at one time, you might have some reason for hesitating; but she has discarded — affronted you, and declared, with a pertness wholly unsuited to her place in society, that she will never enter a family with which she is not upon a perfect equality."

"I have no desire to go into any argument upon that subject," said George; "I had hoped, by the step I have taken about my employment on service, to postpone the conclusion of an affair in which my heart is not, nor ever will be, concerned; but if it is put to me as a matter of duty, and a point of honour, I have only to repent the rashness which induced me to commit myself, and do that which is right."

"There spoke my own George," said Lady Frances, "you now see with your own eyes —"

"Not so," said George; "I see with the eyes of others; but I must give way, when in addition to your view of the case, I refer myself to MacGopus (whose principles of honour are scrupulously rigid, and who, with all his perverseness of expression, never fails to judge correctly), and receive from him a similar decision against me. One favour I entreat; and upon the condition that it is granted I will submit to any thing; let no notice be taken of what you know to be a change in my determination. I cannot make an alteration in my manner towards Catherine; let it be understood that every thing is in progress to the point which you all seem to think so desirable, and let

matters go on as they are. Recollect the struggle I am to make : if unhappiness follows, be the fault where it ought, I must be the victim."

" Well, but now, dear George," said Lady Frances ; who having worked him into this lukewarm compliance with her wishes, " do write to this first lord, or whoever your correspondent is, and tell him that you don't want the ship ; that you —— "

" No, not I," said George ; " no ship — no wife ; if it were not that I had a handsome excuse to separate myself from the lady to whom I am in honour bound, I should not so readily acquiesce in the arrangement. I tell you that the impression made upon my heart by Miss Lovell — an impression strongly increased by the recent discovery of her entire innocence of every imputation against her — is such that time alone can weaken it, or reconcile me to an existence shared with any other woman. I am ready to marry — to please others ; but I am resolved to go to sea — to please myself. Lady Catherine is an Englishwoman, and will not, therefore, object to her husband's resolution to obey the call of his country."

" This," said Lady Frances, " appears to be so near insanity, that, my dear George, I really —— "

" Well, madam," said George, " I have said — you have the condition upon which I am ready to fulfil my engagements."

" But do you think Catherine will subscribe to that condition ? "

" That is not my affair," said George ; " I have applied for employment, because I thought it would relieve me from this tie ; you tell me it will not : well and good ; I have obtained the favour I asked, and I shall have the command of which through life I have been ambitious : I cannot relinquish it. Announce, therefore, to the Duchess that I have got such a command, and leave the rest to time. I have myself little doubt that the arrangement will be almost as agreeable to Lady Catherine as myself ; and she, as mistress of Severnstroke, will have the advantage of your society, that of her mother, and of as many of her friends and relations as she may consider agreeable."

"This is the most unaccountable— inconsistent scheme — leaving all your —"

"Madam," said Lord Weybridge, "I make the greatest sacrifice I can make to justify your conduct. I give up eternally the hopes of happiness — I ask but one condition, and you hesitate. At the end of my three years command my mind may be more reconciled to circumstances, and less under the influence of the fatal passion, which I cannot now pretend to conquer. I relinquish Emma — I accept Catherine, and by the help of Providence, and from the effects of time, I trust I may return to my wife with an undivided affection, and that our future lives may prove as happy as I, at least, have any right to expect."

"A more extraordinary compact, perhaps, never was entered into," said Lady Frances; "however, I must not stand out upon terms. And pray how long do you expect it will be before this odious ship will be ready for sea?"

"Perhaps, three weeks, a month, or five weeks," said George; "she will be ready for *me* in less than half that time?"

"And how should the marriage take place before that period?" said Lady Frances.

"I think it extremely absurd, and I have said so," said George; "but you find me in all things obedient to your will; therefore do you make your arrangements."

"But surely you will avow your intentions to Catherine?"

"I consider that done," said Lord Weybridge; "I have acted," they tell me, as if I acknowledge myself her affianced lover; and, therefore, all we have to discuss is the *happy day*."

"I can scarcely reconcile it to my conscience," said Lady Frances, "to permit you to marry this dear amiable girl under the influence of such feelings; and yet —"

"Oh! I will be any thing you please," said George; "I will bring on the subject this very day—for as you say there is no time to be lost—and we shall be exceedingly joyous, and all will go well and gaily."

These words were uttered by Lord Weybridge in a tone of such cutting irony, with a look which so entirely belied

the expressions he had uttered, that his mother began really to fear that the calamity which she thought had befallen him when he solicited for a ship had come upon him more decidedly and more seriously.

"My dear child, be rational."

"I am rational," said he, "and resolved; you prepare the ladies for my departure on service, and leave the rest to me."

When he parted from his parent, the manner of Lord Weybridge was very unsatisfactory; there was a recklessness in his mode of conducting himself which terrified her; and she began to recollect that a third cousin, twice removed, of the first Lord Weybridge, had died mad, and thence, by a graceful slide down the family-tree, her ladyship traced out the consanguinity, and almost trembled at the probability of her dear George's being affected with the family failing.

The moment she had sufficiently recovered herself from the agitation which the interview had occasioned, she sought and found the Duchess and Lady Catherine: to them she explained the history of the ship, and the appointment, and the honourable feelings of George, who would let nothing like comfort, or ease, or independence interfere with his duty.

"There is one great point gained by the event, I think," said her ladyship; "George, as I forewarned you, is so exceedingly shy and reserved, that he would have gone on 'loving,' as he says, with our dear Catherine, and never have taken courage to propose in form, or solicit her, as to any ulterior arrangements; now that the moment is arrived in which he is called upon to decide, he has gone to his room to write, to summon one of his solicitors hither to talk over business, and will I know, Catherine, put some very sly yet serious questions to you this very evening."

"My dear Lady Frances," said the young lady, "you quite terrify me; besides, supposing he should be serious, what a strange appearance his running away so soon will have!"

"You have no idea of his sensitiveness about the ser-

vice," said Lady Frances; "the effect will only be to mark his devotion to you, and his anxiety to secure your hand before his departure; besides which, as his frigate is destined, at least for the present, for Channel service, you will be able to enjoy his society by taking up your residence at the port at which he may be principally stationed."

"Poor, dear Catherine!" said the Duchess, "and she hates a ship so dreadfully!"

"Oh, mamma," said Lady Catherine, "I am sure I should never hate any thing my husband liked."

"That, my love," said the Duchess, "is not quite so clear to me; but, however, duty is duty, and the only provoking part of the affair is, that he should have been selected just at the particular moment."

"Wholly unsolicited on *his* part," said Lady Frances; "that you may be quite sure of — for who in his senses would quit all the *agrémens* of life, and the society of those whom he most loves and admires, to be tossed about in a creaking ship without a chance of honour or glory during the peace?"

"I am very glad," said Lady Catherine, "as far as I am concerned, that honour and glory are not taken into the present calculation. I shall be much more at ease about George while he has only the dangers of the sea to contend with, than I should if I were living in daily expectation of hearing of some desperate action, in which he was either to be killed or wounded."

By the tone in which the young lady spoke, it is pretty clear that she had always understood the engagement between her and George to have been concluded; and that she really believed the account which Lady Frances gave of her son's shyness and diffidence, and attributed his personal silence upon the subject to those particular causes. The composure, too, with which she discussed the oddity of appearance, which his sudden departure after their marriage would have, and the checking look which the Duchess gave her when she affected to pout about it, all would have proved to the careful observer that, however scant the proportion of love which his lordship might bring to the altar, it was quite sufficient to reciprocate the affections of his

intended, who, although liking him extremely, had never been warmed by his attentions into any feelings of a tenderer nature, and who had persevered in her pursuit of him rather from pique than preference.

"I have done it, old gentleman," said his lordship to MacGopus, who came into his room almost immediately after Lady Frances had left it.

"What?"

"Consented to the marriage with Lady Catherine," said his lordship.

"You have done a very foolish thing," said the Doctor, "but you could not help yourself."

"I have written to Wickins, Snell, and Sibthorpe to send down forthwith."

"Quære, now—who are Wickins, Snell, and Sibthorpe?"

"My attorneys—one of them will be with us in a couple of days, or on the third at farthest."

"What d'ye want with attorneys?"

"Settlements."

"Oh!—ah! I had forgotten all the preliminaries," said the Doctor.

"I must have a serious conversation, I suppose, with the Duchess—or—I tell you what, my dear Mac—I will make an agreement not to touch upon business till the lawyer comes; he shall have the conversation."

"What, talk by attorney, eh? that's not bad," said the Doctor.

"I'll leave the whole arrangement to her Grace and the solicitor—I shall get another short respite, and save a world of trouble. As to Catherine, I must be a little more gentle this evening, for after all she *is* a nice girl."

"I for once agree with you, and I believe you really think so."

"I should, but —"

"Ah!"

"However, the plan I have hit on is the wisest—I fetter myself for life; all I have done is to lengthen my tether for a year or two."

"All that I disapprove of," said the Doctor; "however, you must have your way—you were always fond of

a bit of romance — but I do think preferring a frigate to what you leave behind — ”

“ What would you say if I gave it up, then ? ”

“ I would not give it up either,” said the Doctor.

“ Then I ’ll keep it.”

“ Why, I don ’t know, I ’m not sure about that.”

“ Well, leave me to myself — let me have the next two clear days to consider my bearings, and I shall do : of course they will be glad enough to get back the ship, if I resign it, and say that my marriage will interfere with my proposed arrangement, eh ? — ”

“ Take your own way — you have now got your own leave and your mother’s, and it is deuced hard if you can’t please yourself.”

“ But while that one dear object rules here — here in my heart — ”

“ Psha ! ” said MacGopus, “ come to luncheon — let me hear no more about hearts — you have made yourself quite *tom-noddy* enough about hearts ; so let us go along and meet the ladies, and let me see you behave like a man. Recollect, that by this time they know the whole history of the ship and your proposed expedition — judge for yourself, and act for yourself ; come, come away.”

Lord Weybridge, so shortly destined himself to command, implicitly obeyed the Doctor ; and the party were seated at luncheon when the conversation took the turn MacGopus had anticipated, and more was done in the way of forwarding the great business of the family in the next two hours, than had been effected in the last six weeks. Indeed, the conversation became so animated and easy, that Lady Catherine and Lord Weybridge began to arrive at little scoldings and recriminations, and she even went the length of insisting upon his giving up his odious Destructive, of which he spoke in the most glowing terms of enthusiasm, although he had never seen her ; as captains invariably do when talking of their craft, whether she be as short and as bluff-bowed as a collier, or as sharp and as choppy as a wedge.

Every thing was now settled : Lady Frances was in high spirits, Lady Catherine lively and gay, and George, who

himself had announced the arrival of his lawyer on the succeeding Sunday, was in remarkably high spirits, which from their violence his mother feared were not altogether natural ; and attributed to the sherry which he had swallowed at luncheon, rather than to the feelings of the heart, the vivacity he displayed and the volubility with which he talked.

In a subsequent conversation between MacGopus and Lady Frances, they both agreed that they thought the chances were, he would give up the frigate ; that he seemed to have made up his mind to the step he was in some sort compelled to take, and that a little persuasion would induce him to make his election between Grosvenor-square and Severnstroke, with Lady Catherine and all his comforts, and his Majesty's ship *Destructive* cruising during a sharp winter, employed, perhaps, in overhauling the merchant ships of our allies, under the orders of a non-intervention ministry, or carrying out fresh beef to a bevy of traders in the chops of the Channel, during a hard frost. MacGopus promised her ladyship to open his eyes to the wildness of his nautical scheme, a service in which he was likely to be sincerely active, inasmuch as the noble lord had expressed his immovable intention of pressing him into the service of accompanying him.

The next day's sitting for the picture—the last but two — was infinitely more lively and agreeable than any of the preceding ones had been. The ice was broken, and the betrothed pair felt themselves at liberty to talk prospectively, and build castles ; and Lady Catherine was less reserved and infinitely pleasanter than George had ever yet seen her. At dinner, some of the smaller neighbours were invited, and the day passed off agreeably, and every thing looked smilingly.

The following morning George received a letter from Mr. Lovell, in which, after acknowledging Lord Weybridge's last, he called his attention to an enclosure from Mrs. Harbottle. It had cost her some hours to write, and she appeared greatly exhausted after she had concluded it. The cause of the delay in the answer to Lord Weybridge's letter, was the removal of the party across the

country to Sidmouth. Mrs. Harbottle had borne the journey much better than could have been hoped, but had continued in a sad state of weakness since their arrival at their new residence.

George opened the carefully sealed note from Fanny with deep interest, and read as follows :

“ I am faint and weak, dear Lord Weybridge—much weaker and fainter than when you kindly came to see me. It is only by fits and starts that I can sit up to write this ; but I am anxious to do what I feel is my duty to the most deserving of God’s created beings. I am speaking of dear, good Emma. She is struggling with feelings which will vanquish her before she can conquer them. No sigh escapes her — no tears fall from her eyes — but she is a martyr to an attachment which she has determined to overcome.

“ She will never relax—never yield ; and her father—and where is there on earth a better man ?—supports her in her resolution. God forbid that I should say one word to prejudice you against your nearest relation ! but Lady Frances has been cruel to her — cruel far beyond her deserts. Could Emma feel that she entered your family on terms of equality, all would be well. Her attachment to you is unshaken—nay, believe me, stronger than ever. She speaks of you, and wonders when your marriage is to take place. Oh ! let it be never. The day may come — *will* come, when Miss Lovell may unhesitatingly advance her pretensions. *Be that my care.* I owe every comfort and consolation I possess in the world to her and her excellent father. Should I not be the most ungrateful of beings if I did not secure her happiness ? I believe it to be in my power. I discredit the whole report of your intended marriage : the delay, the silence about it, convinces me it must be all a fabrication. I cannot, I am sure, remain long in this world ; consider this, then, dear Lord Weybridge, as a dying request—continue to cherish the recollection of Emma, as she cherishes her regard for you, and rely upon it all will be well.

“ A thousand thanks are due to you for all your kind-

nesses to a distressed, wretched woman, whose hopes are blighted — whose heart is broken — and who seeks nothing but the grave as a passage to another and a better world. If you answer this, do not allude to what I have said of Emma. When I am *very* ill, I request her to open my letters and read them to me. I would not for the world have her know that I had touched upon this subject. Farewell, dear Lord Weybridge ! Remember my request — my advice — my prayer.

“Yours, truly,
“F. H.”

This was an agreeable letter to receive just at the moment that he had concluded — now irrevocably — his union with Lady Catherine. The appeal of his most affectionate friend must go unattended to, and the voice from her deathbed be unheeded. It certainly seemed as if fate and fortune, after having conspired to exalt and dignify the gallant baron, had now clubbed to make him miserable. As to answering the letter, what earthly good could that do? The announcement of his marriage would follow so closely upon any thing he might offer by way of explanation, that it would be almost insulting to make any reply. One thing appeared evident by Fanny's letter,—that she intended to secure the happiness of her friend as far as fortune was concerned, and that instead of having neglected to make a disposition of her property, as Lovell had feared, she had bequeathed so much of it to Emma as should give her rank in the aristocracy of wealth. What it meant, however, one way or another, mattered little to poor George, who was called away from an attentive perusal of this melancholy document to join Lady Catherine in a ride.

A pretty moment for such an invitation ! With the entreaty of a dying friend in his pocket not to forget the being who was entirely devoted to him, with his eyes half-filled with tears, and his heart ready to burst, to be obliged to mount a great tear-away chestnut horse, and scamper over the turf with the betrothed of his heart, to whom he had engaged himself to be married the next week, upon condition of sailing away from her the week after !

Away they went, her ladyship in the highest possible spirits, and quite charming enough to have fascinated any body whose heart had been entirely free. Towards George all her extra gaiety was evidently misdirected ; and on their return Lady Catherine could not avoid a remark that she thought Lord Weybridge had surprisingly relapsed into his old melancholy since the preceding evening. His mother, who knew he had received a letter from Mr. Lovell, shrewdly suspected the cause of it.

CHAPTER VIII.

Now, Kate, I am a husband for your turn ;
For by this light ! whereby I see thy beauty,
Thou must be married to no man but me.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE situation in which Lord Weybridge was now placed, or rather in which he had placed himself, was perhaps as unenviable as his bitterest enemy could have wished. The effect produced by Mrs. Harbottle's communication was not easily to be overcome ; and when, moreover, it is recollected that, in addition to the ordinary amiabilities of the morning, his lordship had to do the "honours" to a large party who had been invited to dinner that day, and to a "little dance" in the evening, it may naturally be imagined that his varied occupations demanded a more than usual share of attention.

To reply to Lovell by return of post was absolutely and indispensably necessary : his communication with regard to the duties of the executorship positively required it ; but with respect to Fanny — what could he do ? The more he considered her letter, the more he was convinced that she had made a disposition of her vast property in favour of Lovell and his daughter, and had done so without hinting at her proceedings to either of them ; thus enhancing the value of her noble bequest by a delicacy the most refined, and a consideration the most generous. But

of this he dared say nothing to her, because he was prohibited by her own injunctions from touching upon any subject which it might not be considered desirable to communicate to her affectionate friends. The same prohibition more particularly extended to any allusion to Emma, for Fanny had specially entreated him to take no notice whatever of any thing she had said in her letter connected with that young lady. Of what then could his answer consist? — a mere acknowledgment of her letter? Would not this appear ungrateful for all the kind intelligence she had given him? Would it not appear apathetic and indifferent, where, in fact, all his dearest interests centred — interests, too, which he had on the very moment foregone — hopes that he had abandoned — happiness that he had rejected?

It seemed to him that the fairest, the honestest, and the wisest course he could take, would be to announce to Lovell, in the least offensive manner possible, the approaching ill-omened marriage with Catherine, to which he had consented. In a week or two the newspapers would announce it to the world, and how unfeeling and base would it appear to let such a piece of intelligence meet the eyes of his still attached Emma through such a channel! It appeared to him to require more courage than he possessed to set about this work: however, it must be done, and after revolving in his mind the various means of doing it best, he decided upon confining his letter to Lovell to mere matters of business, and unburthening his heart to Fanny; and without referring to any thing she had said in her communication to him, with respect to Emma, state his case, with all the alleviating circumstances, so that if Emma did read her friend's letter, it would contain, in fact, as nearly as possible, every thing he desired to say to her upon the hateful subject, but which, after her resolution not to receive a line from him, he knew it would be useless to address to herself direct.

Lord Weybridge accordingly sat down, and wrote to Mrs. Harbottle what follows: —

" Severn Stoke, Dec. 10. 1830.

" My dear Friend :

" I received with gratitude your kind letter, and rejoice to find you sufficiently recovered from the fatigue of your last removal, to write so much at length. I do assure you that all my humble efforts to be useful are amply repaid by the expression of your thanks. I only lament that the varied circumstances connected with the unfortunate — for so I sincerely call it — change in my position, have hindered me from more particularly evincing my desire to be of service. It gives me some consolation to know that your interests will in no degree suffer, while under the superintendence of our excellent friend Mr. Lovell.

" You will be surprised — as I am myself, and bewildered — to hear that I have been driven into the fulfilment of the marriage which my mother somewhat prematurely announced to our friends. Under a false impression, derived from misrepresentation and calumny, I hastily permitted a pledge to be given, which I have been called upon to redeem : and since I have been so severely punished by the decided rejection of the only being who ever could have made my happiness, I am careless of what is to happen to me.

" I have not a word to breathe against Lady Catherine Hargrave, who is amiable, handsome, and accomplished ; nor have I any one so blame but myself for the rashness with which I permitted myself to fall into the snares which my mother laid for me. To her conduct to Miss Lovell I attribute the resentment which has induced her to prohibit my again addressing her, and the excitement of that just, but, as far as I am concerned, cruel pride, which led her to put a period to our acquaintance. That you may judge how far this marriage is a matter of my own choice, I must tell you, that in hopes of avoiding it, I have secured an appointment to a frigate which will be ready for sea in three weeks or a month, and that, failing in escaping the trammels which had been spread for me, and forced as I am, by what I am told honour and justice demand, into this to me most wretched connection,

I propose quitting my home and my bride in the first week of what is *called* the Honeymoon, to assume the command of my ship, and in the solitude of my station, devote myself to a sincere repentance of my follies, and to an earnest endeavour to reconcile myself to the lot — which I must admit has been partly my own election — but which never would have befallen me, if Emma could have forgiven my error, and overcome her own resentment.

" It is true I applied, in a moment of something like madness, for the command of the ship: my impression was, that my going on service would put an end to the affair with Lady Catherine — or rather the affair between my mother and the Duchess of Malvern; but I was deceived: then I imagined that my firm resolution to proceed to my ship as soon after the marriage as the service required, would have induced the contrivers of it to refuse its completion under a condition which must make my indifference plain to the world. But no — they have determined that by the laws of society I am bound to fulfil an engagement which in fact I never entered into, and are satisfied to let it appear that my anxiety to serve my king and country, by cruising about the Channel during a profound peace, is paramount to every other feeling in my breast; and that the command of the vessel which I have got, instead of being obtained by special application from myself, has been a tribute of approbation of my professional merits bestowed by a new First Lord of the Admiralty, who never heard my name as a sailor, till I myself communicated it to him, and who now concedes to my parliamentary power what he would have denied to all my services if they had been detailed to him.

" My state of mind I leave you to judge: rash and reckless of consequences, I have worked the ruin of all my brightest prospects, and have fallen a victim to the mistaken tenderness of a mother, whose false estimation of her son's merits and pretensions has been the cause of all his faults and follies.

" To Mr. Lovell I have said nothing on this hated subject: how can I? How can I admit myself to be capable of marrying one woman, with a heart devoted to another,

and that other his excellent, exemplary child? Long — long may she live blest and happy in the consciousness of her own excellence! If I dare venture to entreat you to do so much — communicate to her the intelligence I now give, and which she must soon hear from other quarters — explain to her my wretchedness — endeavour to excite her pity for one who is doomed to renounce all tenderer feelings. The whole occurrence seems to me to be a dreadful dream, but alas! there is no waking from it.

"I have ill obeyed the injunctions, but the circumstances are imperative. In all your misfortunes I most deeply sympathise — let me claim a similar feeling from you. I hope to be away, and in the enjoyment of my own thoughts and recollections, in less than a month. If you can spare time, let me hear from you before my departure. I hope to hear better accounts of your health, of which, for the sake of your affectionate friends, you must indeed be careful. Upon all matters of your business I have written to Mr. Lovell.

"Think of me as favourably as you can — recollect the trials I have undergone, and the extraordinary situations in which I have been placed ; above all, assure yourself of my continued esteem, regard, and friendship."

"W."

To attempt to describe the feelings of Mrs. Harbottle, when she heard this letter — for after the caution she had given Lord Weybridge, she felt secure in permitting Miss Lovell to read it to her — or the agony of Emma in reading it, would be vain.

"Here then," said Fanny, "are consummated two sacrifices. He is the victim of stratagem, and management, and persecution — and you, Emma, have overthrown every hope of your own, and killed every wish of mine, by a feeling of pride which you ought, indeed, to have mitigated under all the circumstances of the case."

"Fanny," said Miss Lovell, "I have read this letter with much less emotion than you have discovered in listening to it. I was prepared for it. I intended, when I said so, to relieve him from all obligations to me — I made

the sacrifice voluntarily and resolutely — I knew his happiness would never be secured, if he married contrary to his mother's wishes."

" And do you think," said Fanny, " that his happiness is insured by what has happened, or by the conclusion of this match with Lady Catherine ? "

" I hope it eventually may be," said Emma, " but you see the intelligence Lady Frances so eagerly and somewhat officiously communicated to me, as to his intended marriage with the young lady, proves to be true, and you will recollect that at our meeting, and previous to his departure to visit you at Mopeham, he anxiously desired to renew that sort of conversation which I fortunately checked. Consider, Fanny, if I had encouraged the renewal of his addresses — if I had listened to his professions and protestations at that period, when, as it now turns out, he was actually under an engagement to Lady Catherine, what would have been my present position ? "

" You would have been his wife," said Fanny ; " nothing but your decided rejection of his addresses — nothing but your resolution not to subject yourself to the violence and pride of Lady Frances, and your anxiety not to separate the interests, or to disturb the affections of the mother and son, hindered him from declaring and proclaiming you his choice."

" How would he have been placed, then, with regard to his present intended bride ? " said Emma. " If I refused him then for my own honour's sake, I rejoice now that I did so for his. I have said a hundred times, I was quite aware of the activity of his mother's influence to carry her point about his marriage. I was sure, from knowing his disposition, and the power she has over him, that eventually — I knew not by what means it might be done — that influence would be successful : it has been so, and it is immaterial to both of us how it has so prospered. We are parted eternally, and so we should have been if this course had not been pursued ; some other would have been tried, and after the violence of Lady Frances's expressions to me, in conversations upon the subject, I had resolved never to consent to a union with her son without

her full and entire consent. I felt confident it was not attainable ; and, of course, that conviction was greatly strengthened when he was elevated to the peerage. All this I foresaw—all this I had made up my mind to endure—and now that the hour of trial is come, and all my forebodings are realised, thank God ! I am prepared to meet my fate without a murmur."

It was not without some degree of astonishment that the less determined Fanny witnessed the calmness and resignation of her poor young friend. Emma felt as deeply as woman could the blow she had received ; but anger towards him who had fallen a victim to the trickery and hypocrisy, to which filial affection had rendered him blind, mingled not in those feelings. Upon Lady Frances she rested all the blame, and considered her responsible not only for the misery she had already caused by separating two fond hearts, but for that, which was so likely to result from the uncongenial union she had arranged for two hearts indifferent to each other.

No tear fell from Emma's eyes, while Fanny lay absorbed in sorrow ; and when her father joined them, and enquired if Lord Weybridge's letter to Mrs. Harbottle contained any news of interest, his daughter placed it in his hands with the single simple observation, that all had happened at Severnstroke that she had foretold.

" Unhappy man !" said Lovell, when he laid down his lordship's epistle ; " he has fallen a victim to an easiness of temper, and a facility of credence, which are the strong characteristics of his mind. His belief in our misconduct would have been ungenerous, were not his mother sufficiently artful to impose upon wiser persons than her son ; and his consent to his approaching marriage, under the circumstances he describes, is only another illustration of the same character. Heaven send him happy, but I fear for the success of my prayers, when I take into consideration not only his own expression of dislike to the match, but the anxiety of the other parties, who, in the face of such evidence of distaste to it, seem resolved to hasten and conclude it, in a manner as little consistent with delicacy as

they must feel it to be in accordance with his own inclination."

It may be considered somewhat wrong in point of date to submit this little conversation in this place ; but as much is doing at Severn Stoke during the morning of the day of preparation for the festivities of the evening, it appeared not an unfavourable moment to snatch a glimpse at Sidmouth, to which place, as the reader has already been informed, the party had removed.

In this removal they had cause to be thankful ; for the invalid had not been two days in her new residence before she sensibly felt and visibly exhibited strong marks of improvement in her health and strength. Lord Weybridge's letter, it is true, had the effect of exciting her, and checking the progress of her convalescence ; for Fanny, whose mind was not quite so well regulated as Emma's, expressed herself in more worldly and womanly terms upon his conduct than Miss Lovell could have used, and seemed to feel his abandonment of her friend as a wound to herself, whom he had made the medium of the first communication of his serious and honourable intentions respecting her.

One effect had been produced upon Lord Weybridge by Fanny's letter, which eventually turned out to be an exceedingly important one. He had, up to the receipt of it, from the time he really consented to marry her ladyship, been thinking, that as he must fulfil that engagement, it would be useless, and almost absurd, to accept the command of the ship for which he had applied, and had gone to bed in the mind to write a very handsome letter of thanks to the Admiralty, stating that circumstances had occurred since his application for employment, which had altered his views, and therefore begging to decline the offered promotion as far as the appointment was concerned, and at the same time expressing a wish for the promotion which had been promised him. The announcement of his marriage, so shortly after this letter, would explain what had happened to alter his views, and he should, like other Englishmen — "sit at home at ease" — and making the best of what he still thought a bad bargain, endeavour to reconcile himself to circumstances, and console himself for

the scorn of one lady in the enjoyment of the kindness of another. But Mrs. Harbottle's letter, painting to him the still smouldering passion of his deserted and outraged Emma, revived in his versatile mind all his dormant feelings of affection and devotion ; and he tore the letter he had already written and almost despatched, and renewed his determination of flying to the Destructive, in the cabin of which ship, with a sentry at the door, he might be secure from all interruption, ruminate on past happiness, never to return, and, as he said, moreover discipline his mind down to the enjoyment of a calmer and more rational existence with his noble lady on his return to shore.

What an ingenious creature is man ! there is no situation in the world in which he cannot, by dint of his personal exertions, make himself perfectly miserable ; and certainly of all the examples of that sort of talent with which we have ever met, Lord Weybridge appears to have been one of the most striking — letting it never be forgotten that his mother, whose whole aim through life was to secure his happiness, was the most able coadjutor in his efforts to be wretched.

There are two persons in the drama, whose conduct, it must be admitted, notwithstanding their rank in the state, must appear to be in the highest, or rather lowest, degree undignified — and these persons are no other than the Duchess and her daughter. It is true we have had no opportunity of looking at their characters, *en déshabille*, nor of judging their actions except by report. The Duchess was — as duchesses have been before, and will be again — a match-maker — she has been already noticed for her assiduous preservation of her daughters — (for

" — Gammer she had five ! ")

from George in his earlier career, and was as remarkable in " keeping men off," whom she did not think desirable connections, as she was indefatigable in " keeping them on " when she considered they were. Three of the Ladies Hargrave had made excellent marriages, and Lady Catherine and Lady Isabella, the youngest, were all that now remained on hand.

To say that Lady Catherine was an interested girl, would be to describe what, as I have already said, I believe never, or if ever, very rarely exists. She had always admitted a liking for George, even when he was interdicted, and *she* herself snapped up, if she spoke three words to him. A very little love in these days goes a great way; and the Duchess rejoiced in having an opportunity of gratifying the slight partiality Catherine had formerly evinced, when she found the object of it placed in a position where he had a right to command such a wife, and greatly excited and encouraged to perseverance by Lady Frances, who had been for more years than they either choose to own, her grace's bosom friend and associate, had made up her mind, *coute qui coute*, that her youngest daughter should be Lady Weybridge.

It was not to be supposed that either of the mothers — both of whom were perfectly aware of his pre-attachment to "the Parson's Daughter" — were to be baffled in their designs by the absence of sentiment on the one side, or any symptoms of indifference on the other. Lady Frances wanted the connection, which was illustrious — the Duchess required the fortune, which was ample, and thus the two principals were left almost unconscious of the progress of the negotiations with which they were so intimately connected. In fact, Lady Catherine, as far as she was concerned, would as readily have consented to marry Captain Sheringham two years before, as she was now ready to unite herself with Lord Weybridge — and she was sincere in her regard for him, and quite delighted to find herself permitted to associate with him, upon terms of ease and freedom, so totally different from those which had been permitted before his elevation to the peerage and his accession to so large a fortune.

It is necessary to say these few words in order to acquit the young lady from participating in the plot contrived by the "ancients." — She fell into all their schemes, because it was agreeable to herself to do so; and if George had been more tenderly treated, and more gently managed by his mother, the devoutly-to-be-wished consummation of the affair would have been brought about with much greater

facility. It was the excessive eagerness of Lady Frances which startled him, and her uncalled-for coarseness towards poor Emma which alarmed him ; and the more he considered the means by which his consent had been obtained to the marriage, the more convinced he was, that as love is not to be purchased with gold, so is it not to be excited by compulsion. So it was, however, and so it was to be — Lady Frances thought that a duke's daughter was a very pretty alliance for a baron with forty thousand a year, and the Duchess considered a baron with forty thousand a year a most desirable match for a duke's daughter who had but five thousand pounds in all the world.

"Come, my lord," said MacGopus — "the first dinner-bell will ring in a few minutes — you must go dress — be in time to receive your new visitors and neighbours."

"Hang it all," said George ; "I wish this odious, great, over-grown party had been fixed for any other day than this. I have had many letters to write — much to do — none of it agreeable."

"I thought I saw your lordship and Lady Catherine in the library, looking very comfortable," said MacGopus.

"Trust not to appearances, my friend," said his lordship ; "I am doubly unhappy whenever I am in her presence — unhappy because my heart is not mine to give her — and more unhappy still that it is not, because I really believe she is a very excellent and amiable girl."

"Stick to that opinion for a little, and you'll think better of her yet," said the Doctor.

"No — there can be no such thing as divided affection," said Lord Weybridge.

"She has a claim, or soon will have, upon your affection undivided."

"What are her claims compared to those of the being I have deserted?"

"You have done no such thing," said the Doctor ; "she has discarded *you*."

"Ay, ay, but how provoked?"

"By your own proposal to another!"

"Spare me all this," said Lord Weybridge ; "you see before you one of the most unhappy of human beings.

Why did fate ever ordain that I should succeed to all this rank and fortune, to rob me of her whose affections would have been more valuable to me than either ? ”

“ That’s nonsense,” said MacGopus ; “ Lady Frances would have had just as much objection to her marrying you as you were, as she has to her marrying you as you are ; and therefore your rank and fortune have nothing to do with it, or if they have, they ought to have given you power and independence to do exactly as you pleased, and marry whom you liked.”

“ Job’s comforter, hold that infernal croaking,” said George — “ when I get you aboard the *Destructive* — ”

“ You never will,” said MacGopus, “ for you’ll never set foot in her yourself. — Tut, man, as your mother says, what will the world say if you marry this fine, handsome, bonnie lassie, and go to sea the next week ? ”

“ Why — they will say that I am doing my duty,” said Lord Weybridge.

“ Quite the contrary, my lord,” said the Doctor.

“ I am called into service.”

“ No — you ask for employment.”

“ I have got my promotion on condition of serving.”

“ A mighty great deal of consequence it must be to you,” said the Doctor, “ with your peerage and fortune, and all the rest of it, whether you die a commander or a captain — no — give up that mad scheme.”

“ As I do not agree in its madness, I most certainly shall not abandon it — I love my profession.”

“ You must have wonderfully altered then, since you were in the Old Elephant,” said the Doctor — “ for, saving your lordship’s presence, a lazier hand I never had the pleasure of seeing on board any of his Majesty’s craft than Lieutenant Sheringham.”

“ Would I were there again ! ” said his lordship.

“ I wish you were,” said the Doctor, “ and I had your fortune — how happy we two should be.”

“ Come — there’s the bell,” said Lord Weybridge — “ now for this ‘solemn mockery’ of receiving a set of people for whom I care nothing, in order to keep up a society in which I never mean to join, to be followed by

an influx of half the county, to support what my mother calls my political influence, which I never mean to exercise."

"Now, my Lord," said MacGopus, "I have just one word to say — you must not suppose I have been retained by Lady Frances to worry you or prescribe rules for your conduct — but do, for your own sake — for the sake of appearances, do be civil and attentive to Lady Catherine before the company — you would not wish either to degrade or distress her."

"Why, Doctor, this is a new start you have taken," said his lordship ; "turned lecturer upon high breeding, the nobleman's guide to good manners."

"Psha!" said MacGopus, "I know nothing of high breeding — I don't profess it — but I know what good feeling is — I saw that poor girl last night half in tears at something you said — which you did not intend to wound her — but it did."

"But how can I force myself to be tender?" said George : "I esteem her — I admire her — would you have me sigh and gaze upon her, and weep, and kneel, like an actor on the stage?"

"Ugh! — no," said the Doctor : "I hate the sight of such monkeyish absurdity — gaze you need not in company — because you can look at her when you please — but be gentle to her — recollect the relative situation in which she stands to you — it is not *her* fault that your Emma has been offended — she has had no share in your repulse — be advised by me."

"Your counsel has assumed a new character," said George, "and convinces me that you are more inexplicable than I before thought you — what has made you take such a wonderful interest in Lady Catherine — is it the true instinct — is it because she is a duke's daughter?"

"I shall answer none of your questions," said MacGopus, "nor reply to any of your quibbles — she is a woman, that's one reason for my advice — she is to be *your* wife, and that's another reason for my advice — and rely upon it, the only way to make the woman you love respected, is to show respect to her yourself."

"Love!" said his lordship.

" Well — ought to love — I ask pardon," replied MacGopus — " ought to love — because you will be sure to do so, in a few days."

" Oh ! come, come, come," said Lord Weybridge, " give me my candle — let me go dress. If my Mentor lectures so unconscionably, I shall run stark staring mad — watch me this evening, and see how prettily I behave — but mind — however satisfied you may be with my deference to your advice, do not to-morrow morning triumph over me, and accuse me of having forgotten my — "

" Parson's daughter," said the Doctor.

And so they parted. Lord Weybridge really astonished and even moved at the very unexpected appeal which the Doctor had made. To say truth, although he affected to be ruffled by it, it gave him a higher opinion than he ever yet had of MacGopus, who in the practice of a course of contradiction and interruption, grown into a habit from his having long been the Dictator, first of the gun-room, and of the ward-room afterwards, the protector of midshipmen, and the confidant of his comrades, exhibited a generosity of sentiment, and a tenderness of feeling towards a young, amiable, and sensitive being, placed in a situation of extreme delicacy, which would have done credit to many who fill the world with their professions and pretensions, but who for genuine kindness and innate benevolence, must strike their colours to the rough, good-hearted, provoking MacGopus.

CHAPTER IX.

Duncan sleeps here to night.
— When goes he hence ?
To-morrow as he purposed.

SHAKSPEARE.

WE read of lambs decked out for sacrifice, and Indian women dressed in all their costly array, in order to be burned by the side of their late highly-respected and very

much-lamented husbands ; but never were greater pains taken to celebrate such orgies with becoming splendour than were bestowed upon the initiatory *fête* at Severnstroke upon the memorable day it is now our duty to record. Never did the devoted widow behold the Kusumba-dyed robe in which she was destined to expire, with greater horror than George regarded the gaieties in progress ; nor could the saffron and kajala prescribed by Krishna be more palling to her fevered taste, than were the preparations which were on every side making for the festival, which was to exhibit him and his bride elect to the inhabitants of the neighbourhood.

But he was destined to fight a desperate domestic battle before the commencement of the banquet—like a good freemason he was doomed to labour hard, before refreshment, and at awful odds with his mother, and all his domesticated friends against him, upon a question in which it was clear that he would be left in a glorious minority of one.

This joint attack was commenced after luncheon, at a period when the troops were invigorated and in high spirits, and was opened by Lady Frances, who having announced the determination of the party not to leave George at rest until he had conceded the point they wished to carry, told him, in plainer terms than any body else perhaps could have ventured to do, that if he persisted in his scheme of going to sea so shortly after his marriage, the world would set him down for a madman.

" My dear mother," said George ; and he began in such a tone that her ladyship was terrified lest he should be provoked to say something which would even *then* upset all her arrangements and break off the match, " every man has his peculiar feelings,—you yourself, are the strongest and loudest advocate for the fulfilment of pledges and the observance of honourable duties. I am pledged to my king and country to serve them whenever I am called upon, and ——"

" But," said MacGopus, " you were not called upon to do any such thing."

" We wo'n't dispute that point," said Lady Frances,

who dreaded, lest the Duchess, who did not at all like the ship affair, should discover what her ladyship had carefully concealed from her, namely, that it was at George's own solicitation he was employed ; " all I am sure of is, that, under the circumstances, it will have the strangest appearance in the world."

" You have the choice of two evils," said Lord Weybridge, " either I must have my own way, or we must postpone the marriage till my return."

" What !" said the Duchess, " have you the conscience to wish poor Catherine to wear the willow for three years ? Oh cruel, Lord Weybridge ! "

" Come, my lord," said MacGopus, " write a handsome refusal to the First Lord—you might vote with them as it is, for the intentional kindness, and they can job the Destructive for some other support, and they will give you your post rank, and never stop to enquire your motive so as they get the frigate back again."

" *Et tu Brute !*" said George, " are you against me—you, who first taught me to love the service ? "

" We are all against you," said the Duchess : " it is a subject I cannot bear to touch upon, when Catherine is in in the room, for she feels it deeply. She told me only last night that it gave her an idea that you felt yourself bound to marry her, that you would fulfil the engagement as a matter of duty, and then show the world how little inclination had to do in the affair, by quitting your disconsolate bride upon the expiration of half the honey-moon."

" Why really, Duchess," said George—

" I know exactly what you are going to say," interrupted Lady Frances, who sat in an agony of alarm lest George should be too candid—" but we will hear no arguments."

" That's the safest way, my lady," said MacGopus, " and it saves conversation : — if the House of Commons were to divide first and debate afterwards, it would mighty facilitate the carrying on of public business. One thing, my lord, I am bound to tell you, and that is, I have promised Lady Frances not to accompany you in any character."

"I can do without you," said his lordship — somewhat angry at the sudden conversion of his quondam supporter.

"But now, really, Lord Weybridge," said the Duchess, "let me seriously ask you, is it impossible to get off with honour?"

"Why," said Lord Weybridge, looking very significantly at his mother, "I—I am told not—I repeat, therefore that I am prepared to do what I believe to be my duty."

"Are you fond of the sea?" said the Duchess.

"Not he, ma'am," said the Doctor.

"Come, now," said Lady Frances, "be rational—be dutiful; and if you are so punctilious about duty—recollect your mother—have I no claims upon you?—you know that my whole life has been one of constant solicitude for your welfare and happiness—I am amply repaid by the circumstances that have occurred during your growing up!"

"To wit, the lubberly yachting in the Mediterranean," said MacGopus, taking an unusually large pinch of snuff.

"To the dispensations of Providence, sir," said Lady Frances, gravely, and rather angrily, "we must bow; I am speaking now of my son's conduct through life to his only parent. Never, till the present occasion, have I had a request unattended to, or a desire uncomplied with by him; and I *do* think it hard that upon a point where the difficulty lies rather in the contradiction to my wishes, I may not expect a deference to them."

"I assure you, my dearest mother," said Lord Weybridge, "as I scarcely need do, that your wish is to me law. I feel a delicacy upon the point under discussion which ——"

"Which surely, my dear lord," said the Duchess, "ought, in courtesy, to yield to the delicacy my poor child feels in hearing your preference for the service to her society made so evident that it must naturally become a topic of conversation wherever our families are known."

"Come, my lord," said MacGopus, "recollect what I said to you upon the same subject last night. Sacrifice this little vanity, or chivalry, or whatever it may be which

would set you adrift upon the salt sea, and complete the happiness of those who honour and value you, by settling yourself down amongst your connections, your neighbours, and your tenants, doing good, as your excellent heart will prompt you, and receiving the tributes of affection and gratitude which they will be ready to proffer. Surely that will be better, with a lovely wife into the bargain, than beating about the Land's End through the winter, or reaching, by way of a treat, after a gale of wind, that most appropriate retreat, the Isles of Scilly."

"There is no standing this combined attack of wit and beauty," said George ; who, to tell truth, had himself begun to think it perhaps wisest, after all, to conform himself to the comforts, if not pleasure, of domestic life ; "all I ask, therefore, is a truce — we have a great deal to do to-day — let me only demand four-and-twenty hours' delay. The appeal of my mother, seldom made to me in vain, has had its effect : a day's procrastination of my letter to the Admiralty will do no harm ; and I think the chances are, if you all behave well to me this evening, that I may abandon my scheme. I shall do so with regret, because it looks trifling, and fickle — one day to seek —"

"Oh ! never mind what it looks," said Lady Frances, again checking his explanation of how he had obtained the appointment ; "leave that to us. Depend upon one thing that nothing can look so ill as the sudden abandonment of your wife immediately after marriage."

"He'll come round to our way of thinking to-morrow," said the Doctor ; "I see he relents."

"I am certain Catherine's happiness is at stake," said the Duchess.

"Mine most assuredly is," added Lady Frances.

"Well," said his lordship, "I have said : give me a respite till breakfast time to-morrow, and you shall hear my final decision."

And in this way he pushed off the hour in which he was to make his election. It was true he acted upon impulses, and was moreover suddenly acted upon : the letter of Mrs. Harbottle had completely unhinged and overturned him — then came his resolution to abandon Catherine — now he

felt satisfied that Lady Catherine did care about him, and saw that her mother's pride was wounded by his proposed excursion, and his own mother's happiness very much concerned in it. He saw, too, that all chance of averting the calamity of marriage was passed ; the bridal dresses were preparing, and the lawyer was, in all probability, on the road, to prepare the settlements ; and it therefore seemed probable, unless some new event should arise to give his mind an opposite direction, that he would cleave to the Catherine of twenty, and abandon the Destructive of forty-four.

And soon commenced the bustle — the carriages began to arrive — the guests to alight and the grooms of the chamber to usher them in ; the dinner-party was swollen to twenty-five, and amongst them were people of strange figures, and strange manners ; few amongst the two dozen and one were on the Duchess's London list, and fewer still known to Lady Frances, whose connections all lay northward, and who had for many years never affected to keep any list whatever, except, indeed, of engagements which she had made at the houses of other people.

Nothing, possibly could be more cold, stiff, awkward, and uncomfortable than the whole affair. Lady Frances had selected the guests, and they made, thus formed together, the most incongruous mass imaginable. The leading Tory earl of the county was seated next the wife of the most inveterate Whig baronet, whose eldest son had been defeated at the last general election, by what the baronet thought proper to call the unconstitutional interference of his lordship. A General officer was placed next the lady of a country gentleman, whose sister he had carried off from her husband ; and a matured girl of thirty-one divided two men, one of whom had been shot in a duel by her brother, for having broken a promise of marriage he had made to her ten years before, and whom she had never since seen ; and the other a sporting Colonel, who had won the whole of her said brother's fortune at play, in consequence of which he had been living in Paris ever since the year 1824.

These were but a few of the mishaps and misfortunes of

the day ; every thing seemed to go wrong ; and George, who had the strange Countess on his right hand and Lady Catherine on his left, appeared to as little advantage as ever he did in his life. He speedily saw the error into which they had fallen in making up their party without a proper *carte du pay*, and most fervently wished himself pacing the windward side of the quarter-deck of H. M. S. *Destructive*.

At dinner there was very little talking, and when the ladies retired, that which did duty for conversation chiefly turned upon local affairs, in which no two people present seemed to agree ; this, added to the necessity of referring to George for opinions upon subjects with which he had not yet troubled his head, and therefore knew nothing of, made up a combination of miseries which were only terminated by the announcement of coffee—an announcement not made, however, until after the increased noises, and the sound of many voices in the hall and ante-room, proclaimed that many of the refreshers had arrived.

The scene in the drawing rooms was as gay as such scenes usually are, and, no doubt to four or five couple of hearts in the party, every thing seemed very delightful. The rooms were well lighted, and prettily arranged, and if there had been two or three hundred people more, would have been almost brilliant. The party was just too large to be sociable, and much too small to be easy. Dancing, which began a little after ten, broke the formality, and thawed the English coldness, which stiffened most of the visitors. There was a sprinkling of rural beauty, and one or two “Almack’s” faces, looking fresher and brighter than they were wont to appear towards the end of a London season. The officers of a crack Hussar regiment quartered in the adjacent town, tipped and tufted, made the floors clatter with their arms and accoutrements, and before eleven the intellectual part of the company were in full motion.

The scene grew livelier as the evening wore on ; and George, who had for a moment thrown himself into a huge comfortable chair, contemplated it with a sort of mystified

feeling. He found himself accidentally in the possession of all this splendour — capable at his beck of congregating round him every thing presentable in the neighbourhood — possessing vast influence in the county, with every fair prospect of uninterrupted happiness, marred only by the doubt and difficulty he felt about his marriage. Lady Catherine saw his abstraction, and gliding sylph-like across the room, seated herself by his side. She spoke sweetly and gently to him, and he thought at the moment that he ought to be happy in the possession of so lovely and so accomplished a wife! It was ungracious — ungrateful to maintain a coldness and indifference to a being who really appeared devoted to him, and he conversed with her with pleasure. There was a soft and melting tenderness in the expression of her countenance that had never struck him before : in fact, he had resolved to abandon the Destructive long before this ten minutes' *tête-à-tête* was over.

He danced with her, and the visitors admired the handsome pair. Her dancing was perfection. He led her to the refreshment-room, and the envious eyes of the women and the approving looks of the men hung upon the fair creature, as she leant upon her future husband's arm. Lady Frances was right in making up the party ; it drew Lady Catherine out — it excited and animated her, and it did one thing much more important still — it showed to George how much she was an object of admiration in the eyes of others.

Just before supper, Lord Weybridge was summoned from the saloon to receive a visitor, whose arrival at that precise period was certainly unexpected. He obeyed the summons, and proceeded to his morning-room, where he found the new arrival anxiously waiting his approach. His surprise when he saw his guest was great and unaffected ; however, the nature of his communication was such as to engross all his thoughts, and claim all his attention.

That the individual who appeared so unexpectedly under his roof might at any time have come thither ; nay, if he had only delayed his visit — or rather visitation — for two

days, his appearance would neither have surprised nor agitated him ; but when George entered the room, and beheld him, it was like a vision.

It was evident to Lord Weybridge, the moment he saw his friend, that nothing but business of the most urgent and important nature could have brought him there. He was right in his conjectures, and upon that business George and his friend had a full hour's conversation, during which time all sorts of enquiries were made in the gay circle for the master of the house, but in vain ; and when his retreat was discovered, equally vain were all attempts to draw him from it. At last the dialogue terminated, and the visiter, at his own desire, fatigued by his journey, and not prepared for mixing in the gaieties going on, retired to rest, it having been agreed between him and George that all matters of business between them should be postponed till the morning : the visiter, indeed, apologising for his unexpected intrusion upon the festivities, and regretting very much that he had not been aware of the party, so as to have timed his arrival more appropriately.

When George returned to his company, his appearance was totally changed — he looked reckless and wild — became abstracted — attended to no one, but stood as in a dream or a trance, gazing at all that was passing before him. Lady Frances saw the change which had occurred — she inquired the cause — he told her — “ Nothing.”

She thought she knew who the newly arrived visiter was, and laid the abstraction and apparent despondency of George to the account of the approach of the formalities which were necessary to the conclusion of his matrimonial engagement. She then suspected that Mrs. Harbottle, of whose illness she was aware, was dead, and that more journeys, and more worries, as her ladyship considered them, were to be inflicted upon him ; but he told her that she was mistaken — that he *was* worried, but that he had determined to cast aside care till the morning. This, however, was easier said than done, and when he took the Duchess to supper — who at dinner had graciously condescended to yield her precedence to the stranger Countess

— he seemed wholly absorbed in thoughts, which, to judge by the sudden convulsive twitches of his features, were any thing but agreeable.

During supper he spoke not, and the Duchess in vain endeavoured to rally him. She joked with him, and told him she supposed his melancholy arose from being separated from Catherine, who was sitting nearly opposite to him, looking with pleasure and condescension to one of the well-dressed men of war who was placed beside her.

The reply which George gave to this suggestion was a look which implied ten thousand times more than the Duchess suspected. “ Ah, Duchess!” said he, in a tone of affected heedlessness, “ I shall sail in the Destructive yet.”

The Duchess, who herself thought Catherine was rather exceeding the limits usually placed to the flirtations of an *affiancée*, was convinced that George was actually jealous; this delighted her, because, as there can be no effect without cause, so she concluded there could be no jealousy without love; and accordingly, to gratify him, as she thought breaking up the party would, she whispered to him that she thought they had sat long enough, and, rising from her seat, was immediately followed by all the rest of the guests, the majority of whom voted her Grace extremely disagreeable for shortening the season of such agreeable communication.

Little did the poor Duchess know what was passing in her neighbour's thoughts at the moment that she endeavoured to secure his peace of mind by removing Catherine beyond the range of Major Evelyn's fire — little did she anticipate what was so nearly happening, or rather little did her Grace imagine what had actually happened.

George continued some time at table, and rallied around him some of the more sober-minded men whose “ dancing days” were past, and who chose to sacrifice to Bacchus rather than propitiate Terpsichore; he himself drank more than was his custom; but all in vain, if raising his spirits were the object — it seemed as if a load of immovable weight had been laid upon him; and those of the party who had not the pleasure of an intimate acquaintance with

him, set him down as very well for a lord of the land, but deadly-lively as a landlord.

All this went on until it grew vastly late, and people wondered at the rapid flight of time, and "who could have fancied it five?" and "how delightful it was!" and what a "charming party it had been!" and then came a sort of breakfast, with which the shattered and fatigued dancers again refreshed themselves previous to their final separation for the night, or rather morning.

And at last they went, and George's aching eyes followed the departing train, and he stood lost in thought as the doors of Severnstoke closed upon the last of his guests.

"George," said his mother, "what is the matter with you? who is it that has arrived here — is it Mr. Lovell?"

"Mr. Lovell!" said George; "no, my dear mother; if we wait for visitors till Mr. Lovell comes here, grass will grow on the threshold of Severnstoke."

"Who is it then?"

"There's no mystery in the man or his message," said George; "the interesting unknown is neither more nor less than my solicitor, Mr. Snell, from London."

"Oh!" said her ladyship, "why, how foolish I was not to have guessed. You wrote to him to come here — and to think that I should have puzzled myself about such nonsense!"

"I did write to him certainly," said George; "but as it was impossible, even with all the excellent regulations of our admirably conducted post-office, that he could have received my letter, my bidding did not bring him hither."

"Come, come, George," said Lady Frances, "you must rally from this sort of feeling; the settlements must be drawn, and why assume this air of abstraction and sorrow?"

"Settlements!" said George; "come, come, let us to bed. Has the Duchess retired, and Lady Catherine? Poor girl — 'tis hard upon her."

"I think so, upon my word," said Lady Frances; "and you should consider —"

"We'll put off consideration till the morning," said George. "Ceme — good night, my dear Lady Frances."

"Well, but, George," said her ladyship, "hasn't it been a nice party?"

"Yes, latterly," said his lordship. "The dinner was what I call angular — the guests did not seem to me to dovetail; however, the ball was gay and pretty."

"The next dinner you give, George, we will select better," said Lady Frances. "We will have up the local lawyer who knows the country politics, and all the friends and foes of the district."

"Ha! ha! ha!" said George, with a laugh almost sepulchral in its tone, "my next dinner I dare say will be a mighty fine affair. Good night."

"Heaven bless you, George," said her ladyship; "I wish I could cure you of the gloom."

"Cure! Oh," replied George, laughing, with a ghastly expression on his countenance, and looking as pale as death, "it will all cure itself soon enough. I am pledged to my friend to say nothing to-night —"

"— And *that*, no doubt," said MacGopus, who entered the room at the moment, "is the reason why your lordship will stay up talking with Lady Frances till the sun drives you to bed for very shame."

"My lordship," said George, "will do no such thing. My lips are sealed; but when the seal is broken and morning comes, I think at all events I shall have the merit of surprising even you, who are never astonished at any thing. Come, let us part — to bed —

"Once more, good night."

And so they went — each his way — wondering each after his fashion. A few hours put a stop to all their conjectures, and reduced their vague and wavering doubts to a most positive certainty.

CHAPTER X.

— Prepare to hear
A story that will turn thee into stone.
Could there be hewn a monstrous gap in nature,
A flaw made through the centre by some god,
Through which the groans of ghosts might strike thine ear,
They would not wound thee as the story does.

DRYDEN and LEE, in *Oedipus*.

WHETHER George actually went to bed or not, matters little ; that he did not sleep, is an unquestionable fact. He had spared his mother a night's rest, or at least the rest which as much, or rather as little, of the night as was left might afford her ; for himself he cared little—for her every thing—and there was much for her to bear, much to endure, and in all probability much to suffer.

Long before the ladies were stirring, Mr. Snell and George were together. Their conversation was deeply interesting, and, in the course of it, various questions arose as to the best manner of making a very important communication to Lady Frances, so as to prevent any serious effects from its suddenness or its general character. At last it was agreed that she should be summoned to a council after breakfast, and that Mr. Snell himself should undertake to break to her what her son, knowing the acuteness of her feelings, and indeed the violence of her temper, had not the courage to impart.

What the conduct of the Duchess was likely to be, or what the sensation of Lady Catherine, when the discovery was made, formed an important although a secondary consideration in George's mind. It was known beyond a doubt that a storm was brewing, and that an event was to be announced, not calculated upon in the slightest degree either by the calculating Duchess or the managing Lady Frances.

The lawyer suggested admitting MacGopus into council immediately, because, from the intimacy which, he saw, subsisted between him and George, he felt that he was

worthy of their confidence: but his client refused this proposition, feeling assured that the safest way would be, to let his mother first into the secret, and let her circulate it after her own fashion.

The breakfast party did not assemble till noon, and then Lady Catherine did not "show." Her mother had, as it appeared, given her a lecture upon the unguarded manner in which she had permitted herself to flirt with Major Evelyn, and declared to her that all the unhappiness of Lord Weybridge at supper, and after it, had arisen from the distress of mind which her conduct had occasioned. Catherine who, on the contrary, felt perfectly conscious of her own innocence in the affair, argued the point with her noble mother most learnedly, and pleaded general usage as a justification of her commonplace civility to a very agreeable person. The conflict, however, had been serious, and as her Grace had told her that George had more than indirectly noticed it — which the reader knows he never did — she resolved to have a convenient headache, and not expose herself to the annoyance of any remarks upon her past conduct, or to the degradation of appearing to endeavour to make the *amende* for her fault.

"Mr. Snell," said Lady Frances, when they were seated at breakfast, "don't you think George has done a great deal in the way of improvement here, considering how short a time he has had the place?"

"I think he has, my lady," said Mr. Snell, who my-lorded and my-ladied every body who happened to have a title like a footman.

"Next year he means to break through the old avenue, and so bring out the church tower as a terminus to the vista."

"Yes, my lady," said Snell, with a very odd look.

"I assure you," continued her ladyship, buttering her little bit of toast with the whitest of hands, on the four fingers of which were at least a score of rings, "that I am extremely happy to see you here — and upon such an occasion —"

"Yes, my lady," replied the lawyer, with a look still stranger than the last.

" You seemed quite to have upset poor George last night," said her ladyship. " He hates business — but of course, in his station of life, a man must undergo a great deal of that sort of boring work. How you manage it I cannot understand. I remember the day I was at your chambers with George — the dark, dirty holes you live in. Were you ever in a lawyer's chambers, Duchess?"

" No," said the Duchess, " I don't think I ever was. I have been in the Chancellor's room in the House of Lords."

" Oh dear!" said Lady Frances, " that's quite different : — these chambers are down in areas, or up in garrets, and as dark and dirty as possible — and all around them are stuck great brown canisters, with their clients' names painted on them, just like the things you see in grocers' shop windows, labelled Pekoe, Bohea, Hyson, and Twankay."

" Your ladyship gives a very accurate account of our dens," said Snell.

" I remember," continued her ladyship, " poor dear Lady Stote used to take me, when I was quite a girl, whenever she went on an expedition to her lawyer ; and there we used to be — first of all the man — the gentleman, I mean — that is, the lawyer — used to come out and talk at the window of the carriage ; and then he used to get into the carriage and talk ; and then she would pull out twenty or thirty letters, all tied-up with red tape ; and then, after reading them all over, she would get out of the carriage, and go into the chambers, and leave me till it grew quite dark, waiting for her return."

" Ladies, my lady," said Snell, " are our most persevering clients — and, I need scarcely say, our most agreeable ones."

" Oh dear!" said the Duchess, in a tone of contemptuous civility, " how very gallant!"

" Mr. Snell," said George, " has some business to call your attention to, Lady Frances, after breakfast."

" Oh! I know," said her ladyship ; " so does the Duchess — I think, at least, she can guess."

" I should think not," said George.

MaeGopus, who disliked strangers and hated lawyers, spoke little or none — but he supplied by action what he spared in words, and devoured hot kidneys, cold beef, eggs innumerable, and, as the French say, *pain à discrédition*.

"When can your ladyship spare us half an hour?" said George to his mother.

"Whenever you please."

"Snell, what say you," said George, "to fixing our business after luncheon — the delay will not inconvenience you?"

"Not in the least," said the lawyer; "to-day — to-morrow —"

"Oh no!" said Lady Frances; "let us strike while the iron's hot — I hate delays, especially in matters like that which we have in hand."

"Ha! ha! ha!" said George, rising from table; "my poor dear mother! how little do you know what you are going to hear?"

"Nothing disagreeable, I am sure," said Lady Frances.

"Why," said George, "cela depend — whatever it is, it did not very much exhilarate me last night."

"I have settled all that, Lord Weybridge," said the Duchess; "you know what I mean."

"Upon my honour," said George, "I don't."

"Never mind — all is smoothed — the path shall be strewed with flowers," said her Grace.

"I rejoice to hear it," said George.

"Now remember," said Lady Frances, "and let no other business prevent it — write about the odious ship — do it civilly — but decline it —"

"Wait, my dear mother, wait," said her son. "That ship must not be given up so hastily. Mark my words —"

"Never, Lord Weybridge?" said the Duchess, who still believed that Catherine's conduct had revived the idea of his romantic cruise. "Assure yourself —"

"I can assure myself of few things, Duchess," replied he; "but of this, I think, I can assure myself, that before the bright sun, which now beams on high, buries himself in the blue sea, you will as entirely agree with me, as to my taking that voyage, as my mother yesterday agreed

with your Grace upon the expediency of my abandoning it ; but no more of this. At two we will have luncheon — at three, my Lady Frances, our conference — and at four — ”

“ Well,” said her ladyship.

“ *Nous verrons,*” replied her son, with a very significant look.

The lawyer and his client quitted the breakfast-room to talk — MacGopus proceeded to the library to read — and the ladies went to visit Lady Catherine.

Lady Frances, who knew every turn in her son's mind, became much excited and agitated, when she saw, in its faithful index, his honest countenance, marks of feelings ill in accordance with what she supposed would be the subject-matter of their three-o'clock conversation. She now began to dread that he had determined to marry Emma, in spite of every obstacle — that he considered it the most marked and decided manner of establishing the preference which he scarcely endeavoured to conceal ; and that, by committing what she could not but consider the grossest possible outrage of which man could be guilty, he would at once annihilate the hopes of Lady Catherine, and defy the consequences.

The Duchess, too, had confided the little history of her daughter's flirtation to Lady Frances, who received the information with regret and apprehension, believing in the view her Grace had taken of it, and knowing how sensitive her son was upon such points : yet she controlled herself, and subdued her apprehensions, and talked over the conditions of the settlement which had been previously arranged, and told the Duchess that she might rely, upon the present occasion, upon her taking care that in the draft, which was no doubt to be made that day, Catherine should be perfectly satisfied with her exertions for her comfort and advantage.

An attachée of *M. Maradan Carson* was expected in the evening, with échantillons of all the most fascinating and bewitching articles of taste and fashion for the bridal dress ; and, at her ladyship's request, the diamonds, which George most religiously regarded as family property, were laid

before Lady Catherine in the best possible order of arrangement, as they were to be presented to her by her future husband in the evening.

"As for my part, dear Lady Frances," said the Duchess, "I do confess — God knows I have no undue ambition — that I scarcely hoped to be able to marry Catherine so delightfully well. Lord Weybridge is so superior — so accomplished — so well principled — so noble in his disposition — that, if he were nobody, I should consider him an excellent husband for any daughter of mine."

"Yes," said Lady Frances, "he is a good creature — so extremely kind to me — so considerate. Now this ship affair — you 'll see how it will end ; — he will sigh about his odious frigate for an hour or two, but depend upon it, without another word, his letter of refusal goes to town to-night."

And so this pair of mothers went on praising their own dear children in a strain highly commendable in parents ; and they were so happy, and so fond of each other, and so amiable, that it was clear nothing in this world could divide their interests, change their opinions, or disturb their intimacy.

At luncheon Lady Catherine appeared — she was all softness, tenderness, and languor ; — her headache was so oppressive, and *Eau de Cologne* was so refreshing, and the party had been so agreeable : — but there were some bores — some of those officers of the hussars were excessively disagreeable. Lady Catherine really thought that one of them must have drunk too much wine — he worried her to death — and so on : and then she sipped a little sherry and water, and re-invigorated herself — and the carriage was ordered at half-past three — and Lady Frances, and George, and the lawyer, retired to George's room.

"Sit down, my dear mother," said George, "and prepare yourself to hear something which I am quite sure, even with your felicity of imagination, you are not prepared to guess at."

"Answer me, George," said Lady Frances, "is it connected with Binford — with your marriage ?"

"It is connected," said her son, "and intimately con-

nected, not only with Binford but with Severnstroke, and with my marriage most certainly: it is, moreover, connected with my personal character, and with the place and station which I hold in society."

"What can you mean?"

"I mean, my dear mother," said George, "that a blow is about to fall upon us — or rather has fallen, in which we ought to rejoice as Christians, but which at once dissipates all the splendour with which we are surrounded — sends the Duchess from our doors — and bears away the blooming Lady Catherine — melts all our plate — dissolves our diamonds — crops all our trees — and strips us of a home."

"How? —"

"Why, neither more nor less than this; we are here only on sufferance, and must go hence at the call of mine excellent lawyer, Mr. Snell."

"How should he, or anybody else, drive Lord Weybridge from his titles and estates?"

"Prepare yourself for it," said George, "I tell you 'tis a blow — I am not Lord Weybridge."

"Not Lord Weybridge? — What then?"

George had sprung the mine; he was too much affected to follow it up: he jumped up from his chair, and turned his face to the window.

"What do I hear?" said Lady Frances.

"So it is, my lady," said Snell; "I have here the narrative of the circumstances forwarded and attested by the English minister at Naples."

"Who claims my son's title?" said her ladyship: "what does it mean?"

"The eldest son of the late lord," said Snell, "who, by something like a miracle, escaped from the catastrophe which engulfed the rest of his family."

"What proofs are there of this?"

"Enough, my dear mother," said George; "the real Lord Weybridge, which I am not, is on his way to London *via* Paris — his escape was wonderful."

"When the ship struck the yacht," said Snell, "the present lord was in the act of stepping upon deck; he

describes the shock as violent and instantaneous, something beyond description awful. In the crash — momentary as it was — instinct prompted him to catch hold of something : he seized a rope, which struck him in the collision, and in an instant was borne by a huge toppling wave away over the frail vessel which contained his ill-fated parents and relations — he still held on, and in another moment found himself clear of the yacht, and hanging by his hands at the bow of the destroying ship. His cries were loud — they were heard — in an instant all hands ran forward to lend him assistance ; he still kept hold of the rope, which fortunately for him was adrift, and he was hauled into the ship more dead than alive."

" This," said George, " is his own narrative, attested by our minister."

" When he recovered he found himself in bed in the captain's cabin, scarcely conscious where he was, or of the heavy loss he had sustained. He describes the grief and anxiety of the captain to have been excessive, and his exertions to discover any part of the wreck unremitting. It blew excessively hard, and the darkness of the night was such that they could form no accurate estimate of the distance which they had run from the spot where the disaster occurred before they could shorten sail, and then it was a matter of utter hopelessness to endeavour to retrace their course : they lay to and tried to keep their ground, but all their exertions were unavailing, and they never saw a vestige of the unfortunate yacht, nor of the piece of wreck upon which the only other two seamen were saved."

" But," said Lady Frances, who was not yet aware of half the difficulties and embarrassments in which this event would involve both herself and her son, " what has caused so long a delay in the receipt of this intelligence ?"

" The circumstances, my lady," said the lawyer, " are these : the vessel which caused the dreadful collision was a French ship, bound from Marseilles to Odessa, and it was impossible for her to touch at any intervening port, for several cogent reasons, set forth in the attestation of these facts by the captain : it was necessary, therefore, for Lord

Weybridge to proceed to the place of her destination. His lordship's health was extremely delicate, and the circumstances of the loss of his family told upon his constitution in the protracted voyage, and he remained for several weeks at Odessa, too ill to write or forward any intelligence respecting his preservation. He continued under medical care in an English mercantile house there, by the owner of which he was supplied with every necessary and comfort, and about ten weeks since left Odessa in better health than could be expected, whence, as Captain Sheringham says, he is travelling *via* Paris to London, and whither, by my advice, Mr. Crabshaw is gone to meet him."

"What! George's chaplain? —"

"— My dear mother," said George, "I have no chaplain — no right to one — and I think, as far as my marriage goes, no need of one at present."

"I am amazed," said her ladyship,

"I told you to prepare yourself for a blow," said George, "and one which will fall more heavily than you may yet anticipate. I am personally responsible to the present lord for all the rents I have received during my delusion, and indebted to him in all the sums I have expended."

"But what are we to do?" said Lady Frances. "How shall we break it to our friends?"

"Let it take its own course for a few days," said George, "and our friends will scarcely be sufficiently numerous to make it any great matter of difficulty to inform them."

"But what a blow upon the dear Duchess!" said her ladyship, who at the moment was thinking of her own embarrassments and involvements.

"Yes," said George, "her Grace will lose a baron for her son-in-law, unless, with a devotion and delicacy which interest and a predetermination sometimes overcome, she contrives so that her daughter shall transfer her affections to my rescued cousin, and marry the title although she change the man."

"What an idea!" said her ladyship. "But now really, Mr. Snell, what is to happen?"

"Nothing that shall personally inconvenience your ladyship," said Mr. Snell; "of that I shall take care — but

the absolutely necessary part of the affair is the surrender of the whole of the estates and property, accounting, as the Captain says, to the real possessor for the amount received and disbursed."

" And Catherine's diamonds, George?" said Lady Frances.

" Why," said George, " as they are not mine to give, they cannot be hers to keep."

" How distressing," said her ladyship; " because of one thing I am sure,—that neither Catherine nor her mother will hear of any alteration in the arrangements: a cottage, with the man she loves, is what that dear amiable girl would prefer to a palace without him."

" That sounds very romantic," said Sheringham, " and must be, according to your principles, rather foolish: I remember suggesting something of that sort myself, only reversing the case, and your ladyship was pleased to be exceedingly angry."

" When must we quit this, Sir?" said Lady Frances to Mr. Snell.

" Only as soon as convenient," replied the lawyer.

" Thank God!" said George, " this ends all squabbles about my importance, and the value of an alliance; and above all I am right glad that I have still under my foot the quarter deck of his Majesty's ship *Destructive*: I told you it would go hard but I should sail in her yet, and now my prophetic anticipations are realised."

" There will be no occasion for any such proceedings," said Lady Frances.

" Well, I am glad to see you bear this reverse with so much placidity," said George.

The truth is, that the stillness of Lady Frances was anything rather than placidity: she was overwhelmed—paralysed—as the sea in a violent storm becomes smooth by the mere force of the wind: a thousand complicated terrors filled her mind, more immediately personal to herself than the mere loss of the dignity to her favourite son—it seemed as if ruin had fallen upon them; she was conscious that the demand upon George was more than the whole of her own fortune would defray—that all the bills at Dale

Cottage remained unsettled — and that even if she weathered the storm by which they were overtaken, she should be compelled to return to Binford, in reduced means, an object, perhaps, of compassion to the Lovells and the rest of the neighbourhood.

" Under whose care will the present lord be placed till he comes of age ? " said her ladyship.

" That will depend upon himself," said Snell ; " he is of competent age to make his choice ; but I suspect he will be guided in his election entirely by Mr. Crabshaw, his tutor, to whom he was always much attached, and who has gone to meet him at Paris at his special request."

" Mr. Crabshaw I once saw in Brook Street, George ? " said her ladyship.

" Yes, you did," said her son ; " and I recollect your most pointedly affronting him because he ventured to differ in opinion with you about some exhibition, the merits of which you were discussing. That will not facilitate our arrangements at present : a serious injury a man perhaps forgives upon principle, or because it has been somehow atoned for ; a personal affront — the slightest scratch upon the *amour propre* of such a thin-skinned gentleman as Mr. Crabshaw, never heals."

" And his influence," said her ladyship, " you think is considerable ? "

" I do, my lady," said Mr. Snell ; " and it seems natural it should be so : he has been his lordship's constant companion during his growing up — highly esteemed, and generally consulted by his father, who had the highest opinion of him, and confided to him most of his views and intentions, especially upon the subject of his sons. It is natural that, spared as Mr. Crabshaw has been from the general calamity, he should feel a melancholy pleasure in his society, and a sort of filial gratification in attending to the counsel of one selected by his late father to form his mind and regulate his pursuits."

" Have you any idea," said Lady Frances, who seemed to entertain a hope that the young lord would select her son as his guardian, " as to the probable object of the young man's choice ? "

"I have reason to think," said Mr. Snell, "that he will put himself under the care of the chancellor; and I am led to believe this, from some conversation which I had with Mr. Crabshaw before his departure for Paris."

"What, sir," said her ladyship, "have *you* seen the tutor?"

"It was from Mr. Crabshaw I first was apprised of all the circumstances of his lordship's existence," said the lawyer. "He wrote to the bankers and to us — he also wrote to his friend and tutor, and at much greater length than to any body else — indeed, we were referred to Mr. Crabshaw for all the more minute particulars of the affair."

Lady Frances did not at all admire the rigid impartiality of the solicitor, who had felt it his duty to exert himself most actively in executing the wishes of the young lord; forgetting that the natural allegiance of the firm was due to that branch of the family, and that he had only taken up the affairs of her son as being connected with it.

"Rely upon it, my lady," said Mr. Snell, "that every regard will be paid to your ladyship's comfort and convenience. I had what I knew to be a most disagreeable duty to perform; and certainly, if I had been aware of the gaieties of last night, I should not have intruded during their existence."

"Oh! I am sure," said Lady Frances, "that you — of course you are not to blame — only, what puzzles me — what is best to be done?"

"Calm your mind, my dear mother," said George, "and compose your features: impart our downfall to the Duchess and her daughter — prepare to lay aside a state and ceremony which it cost me a bitter sacrifice to maintain, and, thank God, you have a son not worse off than he was before the fatal accident which lifted him up for a moment, but who is able and willing to fight his way through the world with just as much philosophy as if he had never been a peer."

"All that's very true," said Lady Frances; "but —"

"I know," said George; "but we must bear up against the ills which assail us. The unlucky part of the affair I confess to be the diamonds, to which I have no right —

but you must manage that — and, as I can pretty well guess what the course of the Duchess will be, it is only a matter of delicacy to return the *cadeaux de noces*, and I shall immediately take the opportunity of handing them over to my trusty friend, Mr. Snell.—I presume,” continued George, addressing himself to the solicitor, “ that the arrangements necessary to be entered into, for the restitution of property expended, will not be of a nature to hinder my proceeding forthwith to Portsmouth to commission the ship to which I was, only three days since, so luckily appointed.”

“ Certainly not,” said Snell; “ I will take care of all that, and I am sure you will find every disposition to make the affair as little uncomfortable as possible to you ; indeed, the circumstances are such, that it would be cruel to press hard upon you for a reimbursement of what you had every right to imagine your own.”

“ I am bewildered,” said Lady Frances — “ I see the necessity of taking some decided step — but I feel incapable of action.”

“ In the first place, my dear mother,” said George, “ I repeat, go and impart our sad secret to the Duchess — that I maintain to be the first thing to be done : as for myself, I suppose my excellent tormentor, MacGopus, will have no objection now to be my companion at sea, and — ”

“ — Still the sea, George,” said Lady Frances.

“ Oh, assuredly — and, if we are lucky enough to have a war, I will pay off my liabilities with prize-money.”

“ Well, I see my influence is unavailing — but,” said Lady Frances, “ recollect the dear Lady Catherine.”

“ Ay, ay,” replied George, “ you perform your part in the affair — relate the history of our unlooked-for tumble, and all that will be left for me to do will neither be difficult nor important.”

“ I go,” said her ladyship, “ because I agree with you in the necessity of making the communication ; — that it will make any serious alteration in your prospects there, if I know any thing of Catherine or her mother, I think I may justly doubt.”

"*Nous verrons*, as I say," replied George.

" You are not going to-day, sir ? " said her ladyship, graciously, to Mr. Snell.

" Captain Sheringham is good enough to wish me to stay till to-morrow," replied the lawyer, " and I shall avail myself of the pleasure of remaining."

" We shall meet then at dinner"— saying which, her ladyship proceeded to the room appropriated for Lady Catherine's studio, where the nearly finished portrait of Lord Weybridge stood waiting on its easel for a last sitting — the expectant artist, *en costume*, wondering at George's delay, and watching the fast retiring daylight, with an anxiety justly proportioned to the scolding the Duchess had given her for her indifference the night before.

George and Snell together hunted out the Doctor, and to *him* the story was confided. He received it in a manner different from that which he was usually wont to assume in listening to narratives. He was greatly affected, — much, indeed, to George's surprise — he neither *queried* their statements nor contradicted their assertions ; and all he said, when the story was concluded, and the fact established, was — " Then the Destructive for ever ! "

" And you on board of her, MacGopus," said George.

" We'll see, sir," said MacGopus — " we'll see — umph — this is bad. It isn't that in *my* mind the oldest lord in the peerage is one bit better than a post-captain in his Majesty's navy — but it's hard to be hoisted up, and thrown from a height — the fall hurts — and it will hurt Lady Frances : it is an ugly business, and yet one dare not murmur at the dispensations of Providence, which have spared this young man from the general wreck of his family."

George saw, or at least fancied he saw, that MacGopus was greatly annoyed — indeed, almost overcome ; and quitted the room to join his mother, in order to see the effect which had been produced upon the Duchess and her daughter.

" These reimbursements will worry him," said MacGopus to Snell.

" I shall manage so as to inconvenience him as little as

possible," said the lawyer — " and it may be that Lord Weybridge will feel no disposition to press the matter ; but, unfortunately, Cra bshaw, who has great influence over him, has taken deadly offence at some observation upon the vulgarity of his manners or coarseness of remarks which Lady Frances happened to make one day in London, indeed the only day he saw her, and it has left an indelible mark on his mind. I hope and trust that such a feeling will not be permitted to operate seriously to Captain Sheringham's disadvantage, for a better heart or kinder disposition I never met with."

" What will be the probable amount of the claims against him ? " said MacGopus.

" According to my calculation," said Snell, " including purchases of plate and furniture — which, however, may in all probability be taken over by the new lord — somewhere about seventeen or eighteen thousand pounds."

" Ah ! " said MacGopus, with a sigh — " more, you see, than he will succeed to, even upon the death of his mother."

" Who," said the lawyer, " I am sorry to hear — and I have heard it, not professionally — is involved to a much greater extent than either her son imagines, or, as I think, she herself believes."

" It is a bad business," said the Doctor ; " and yet one, as I have just said, at which one ought not, in truth and justice, to repine."

While this conversation was passing in the library, a scene was in progress in the studio. When George arrived, the disclosure had been made, the merits of the case discussed — the Duchess was evidently much flurried — the affair between the Captain, in the character of Lord Weybridge, and her daughter, had gone to such extremities, and the surprise was so great — and the affair so sudden.

Catherine was sincerely affected ; because she really liked George — loved is perhaps rather too strong a term — but she was convinced, like or not like, love or not love, that the match was at an end. She was brought to Severnstroke to marry Lord Weybridge, its master ; and she was perfectly convinced, by the experience she had of

her mother's conduct towards George on other days, that now he was not Lord Weybridge, and that Severnstroke did not belong to him, she was not destined to be his wife; — and it was quite absurd — if any thing *could* be laughable at a period of such general sorrow — to see her progressively disencumber herself of all the paraphernalia in which she was habited for the purpose of painting his picture: she disrobed gradually, and dismantled all the apparatus regularly, as the history of their discomfiture proceeded, sentence by sentence.

First, shortly after the opening of the sad story, she laid down the pencils she had been grasping, still retaining the palette stuck on the thumb of her left hand: at another stage of the narrative the palette was abandoned: at a further stage her ladyship untied and took off the curiously contrived apron and sleeves, which were destined to guard her skin and drapery from the effects of the paint: until at last, when the catastrophe was announced, she silently rose from her seat, and taking the picture of George off the easel, turned it, like Barbara Allan's sweetheart, with its "face unto the wall," and then shutting up the easel itself, deposited it in the corner where it was accustomed to stand when unemployed.

"Well," said the Duchess to George, as he entered the room, affecting spirits if she had them not, "this is a sad history!"

"Rather a glad one," said the captain: "your Grace must recollect that a life has been saved which we believed to have been lost — "

"But such a blight to all your prospects!" said the Duchess.

"My prospects are much what they were four months ago," said George; "I have a profession which has made many a man greater than I have yet been. I have health and good will to work my way, and I have plenty of kind friends to cheer me in my task of duty."

"When do you go to your ship?" said the Duchess.

"Exactly at the time I proposed the day before yesterday," was his reply.

Catherine here somewhat hastily quitted the room. She saw what would infallibly happen.

"And disregard all that dear Catherine said?" asked Lady Frances.

"Why," said the Duchess, "as to my poor child, it is certainly a dreadful blow upon her — you see she was unable to remain here any longer."

"There has no blow fallen," said George, "which can harm *her*; it is true I have not the title of Weybridge, but I am, barring that small distinction and its concomitant wealth, which never could have weighed with a young heart like Catherine's, to all intents and purposes the same person I was yesterday — the same blood runs in my veins — the same feelings animate my heart —"

"To be sure," said the Duchess. "Yes — that is all very true; but — one's arrangements — the difference — that is I don't know — Catherine has told me, long before this event, that she feared you did not feel that affection for her which — in short, I doubt — if —"

"Duchess," said Sheringham, looking at her with an expression which must have cut her to the heart, "your Grace's daughters have all succeeded admirably in their matrimonial connexions. It is quite right that Lady Catherine should keep pace with her sisters: upon occasions like this, the less said the better. Whatever her inclinations may be, remember *your* Grace's mind is changed — *mine* is not — I leave this to-morrow, for Portsmouth, to assume the command of my ship."

"My dear George," said Lady Frances, "but consider Lady Catherine's feelings — the suddenness —"

"My dear Lady Frances," said the Duchess, "I am not sure that the very suddenness of such events as these — so unlooked for — so unexpected, does not diminish the pain and distress they would otherwise occasion. We shall only worry and agitate you by remaining here, and I think it would perhaps be wisest if we were to start, so as to avoid a formal separation."

"Separation," said Lady Frances; "why! my dear Duchess, do you really mean that this event is to terminate the proposed connexion between us?"

"I think it would be but prudent it should," said the Duchess ; "Catherine's fortune, you know, is small, and yours, my dear George ——"

"Is all to be made, madam," said Sheringham, bowing with an affected respect.

"I don't think I should be justified in permitting a daughter of mine to marry under such circumstances."

"But," said Lady Frances, "do you really think that Catherine will quietly admit the abandonment of a man to whom she is engaged?"

"I think she will," said the Duchess ; "and I am more inclined to think she will, because in my opinion she ought to do so. In engagements of this sort, there are certain conditions—certain terms. Circumstances unluckily prevent your son's fulfilling those conditions, and I consider myself, and consequently my daughter, entirely exonerated from any claim."

"I really am surprised," said Lady Frances, "at the view your Grace takes of the affair : I ——"

"No," said the Duchess, "I am candid and open in my observations, and I will honestly confess that I am not sorry for what has happened, except for your sake. Catherine, I assure you, has complained to me, with tears in her eyes, of coldness on George's part, which so little accorded with her enthusiasm and feelings that she could not but believe his intended marriage to have been more the consequence of a conviction that he was actually under an engagement, than the result of that sort of affection which she considers absolutely and essentially necessary to happiness."

"How could she imagine such a thing?" said Lady Frances.

"Easily enough, my dear friend," said her Grace ; "I saw it too, — and," added her Grace, addressing herself to George, "my apprehensions were not a little strengthened by your extraordinary resolution about going to sea so soon after marriage ; that was a blow which wounded her pride, and offended her delicacy."

"Let us end this discussion," said George ; "it is most painful : the only consolatory part of the affair is deriv-

able from your Grace's last observation. If the fall of my fortunes has prevented your Grace's daughter from uniting herself to a man whom she did not think attached to her, it has its advantages. It is not for me, in my present position, to vindicate myself from the suppositions of others. I know myself—I know what I consider my duty—I am prepared to do it. I rejoice that I am spared, by events over which I have had no control, from making so amiable a being as your Grace's daughter unhappy; and that I am encouraged to withdraw from a connection in which, since candour appears to be the order of the day, I admit I did as little anticipate perfect happiness as Lady Catherine herself appears to have done."

With these words, George, who was seriously angry at the paltry littleness of the great lady, quitted the room, apparently with the intention of not returning to it again, at least for some time.

"Captain Sheringham," said the Duchess, "is exceedingly rude;—the habits of his profession, and the manners of the gun-room, must be his best excuse. I can of course no longer render myself liable to similar remarks, or a repetition of such behaviour, and therefore, painful as it is, I must beg leave to order my carriage, and quit the house of an old friend, from which I must certainly say I never expected to depart under similar circumstances."

"My dear Duchess," said Lady Frances, who still clung to the hope of the connection —

"I must be positive," said her Grace; "I am quite sure of one thing, and that is, that a formal parting or separation between us would be most painful and distressing. Indeed, after your son's observations with regard to Catherine —"

"They were provoked by your previous remarks," said Lady Frances.

"No matter," continued the Duchess — "I must act according to my feelings of what is due to myself and my family: you are going out — your carriage is at the door — never mind us — we will take our departure when you are absent, and when we meet again I trust we shall meet as friends."

" Since you are determined to go, Duchess," said Lady Frances, " I must insist on remaining to see you off."

" All I bargain for is, that Catherine may be spared any interview with your son," said the angry mother ; " she would not survive it."

" I believe," said Lady Frances, who, finding sweet words of no avail, began in turn to fire up, " neither your Grace nor Lady Catherine need apprehend any intrusion on his part."

The Duchess, seeing that Lady Frances was getting into a rage, and preparing to open a battery upon her, adroitly quitted the serious and elevated tone, and dropped into the familiar, and made preparations for leaving the room — a movement which Lady Frances endeavoured to prevent. Her Grace, however, was resolved, and passed out of the studio in a heat of rage, such as her friend had never seen excited before.

Her ladyship proceeded in search of her son, to communicate to him, what to his ears was the most welcome intelligence possible ; namely, that the Duchess was in a passion, and had resolved to depart forthwith in dudgeon. In the mean time, her Grace went to her daughter's room, where she found her, much to her amazement, in tears ; while in the ante-room stood one of the assistants of Madame Maradan Carsan, who had arrived early in the morning with all the bridal finery, which was spread out upon the tables, and sofas, and chairs, ready to be selected and approved of.

Her Grace was as good as her word — so was George : he mounted his horse, and rode off to the adjacent town in order to get out of her way ; and she, having reconnoitred and watched his movements, took all the advantage of his absence which he meant to afford her, and about half-past five, having shaken hands with Lady Frances, who would not leave her, threw herself into her travelling carriage, in which Lady Catherine had already been placed, having resolved neither to see nor speak to anybody connected with Severnstroke previous to her departure.

CHAPTER XI.

The woes of life are lessen'd by a friend :
In all the cares of life, we by a friend
Assistance find — who'd be without a friend ?

WANDESFORD.

"I TOLD you so, my dear mother," said George, as the now reduced circle began to assemble for dinner — the last, or nearly the last, they were destined to eat in Severnstroke House ; "I told you what the character of her Grace's affection for us was."

"But, my dear George," said Lady Frances, "you offended her — you spoke in a manner which it was next to impossible she should endure."

"Not a bit of it," replied the Captain ; "if I had been to-day what I was to all appearance yesterday, she would have called my decision spirit, and my conversation wit. No — I saw she was determined to make a quarrel of it, and I resolved to give her a favourable opportunity. I know her well. As for Lady Catherine, my opinion of her is very different ; her failing is only that of falling into her mother's views, and being very obedient when her duty does not run counter to her inclination."

"Poor Catherine," said her ladyship, "I assure you was deeply affected, and I believe would have given the world to see you and bid you farewell. She cried bitterly when she came to me to return the diamonds and other cadeaux with which you had presented her."

"Whether her tears were shed for the loss of the trinkets," said George, "or of your ladyship's hopeful son, does not appear so certain."

"Don't be ungrateful, George," said his mother ; "I admit I have been disappointed in the Duchess, but I still maintain my original opinion of her daughter."

The appearance in the drawing-room of Mr. Snell, who had been occupied during the whole of the day with the bailiff and land-steward, and under whose directions an in-

ventory of the furniture of the house was now making, distinguishing the new from the old, and who had, in consequence of his honest and zealous exertions on the part of his young and noble client, become most particularly odious to Lady Frances, put an end to the conversation, or rather changed it to more general topics.

"To-morrow," said Lady Frances, "I go hence — I suppose for ever. I shall now, however, be able to fulfil my original intentions, of passing my Christmas at my brother's at Grimsbury; so that I have something left to fall back upon."

"And I," said George, "and my angularly minded companion, the faithful MacGopus, shall proceed to London, where I shall merely sleep, and then run down to Portsmouth, where my ship is; I shall hoist my pendant, and make all speed in fitting out and getting a good crew; and then, down foresail, and be off in a fortnight or three weeks at the latest."

"How delightful is the elasticity of mind you possess," said Lady Frances, who now as strenuously advocated his going to sea as she had formerly opposed it; "devotion to a profession is every thing — no success can be looked for without it."

"I must write to Lovell before I start," said George.

"To Mr. Lovell?" said his mother.

"Yes," said George, "about our executorship accounts, and to inquire after the poor widow: perhaps youth and a fine constitution may bring her through; but, if they do, I shall be most agreeably surprised. Lovell does not yet know of my sudden tumble in society."

"I dare say it will create a world of sympathy in their little community," said her ladyship.

The announcement of dinner stopped Lady Frances in the middle of what, in all probability, would have turned into a satirical history of the party, delivered to Mr. Snell, but intended for her son. Snell's modesty held him back from offering his arm to Lady Frances, who, more pleased with his respect than she would have been gratified by his civility, walked mincingly towards the dinner-room alone, followed by the two gentlemen.

When they came to the table, covers were only laid for three.

"Where is Dr. MacGopus's cover?" said George.

"Dr. MacGopus is gone, sir," said the butler.

"Gone!" exclaimed George; "gone where?"

"To London, I believe," said the man; "he desired to have one of the boys from the stable to carry his bag and portmanteau to the lodge; and the boy says he got into the London coach that passes at five o'clock."

"What is the meaning of all this?" said Lady Frances.

"Oh, nothing," said George, "nothing; he had some particular business to-morrow in town. I suppose he did not like taking leave."

This was not true; but George was stricken to the heart by the unexpected defection of him upon whose constancy of friendship under all circumstances he had implicitly relied: it was a subject he could not discuss before the servants; he therefore made an excuse for the Doctor's absence; but the struggle to conceal his feelings rendered him unconscious of what he was doing, and induced Lady Frances, who, like another Lady Macbeth, had no desire that the abstraction of George should be evident to the spectators, to beg Mr. Snell to help the soup.

"How very odd!" said George; "umph!"

"Why, my love," said her ladyship, "you always knew he was odd; not that I see any great oddity in not taking leave of persons to whom one is attached — what can be more horrid?"

"But he might have staid till morning," said George, "he would then have gone with me."

And George felt his going deeply: he had always considered the Doctor as of the pine-apple tribe, rough without, but rich within; and the loss of his rank, title, place, and pre-eminence scarcely affected him so much as the desertion of one whom he believed devoted to his interests under any circumstances.

The evening passed heavily enough: Snell was not an extremely vivacious companion, and it was difficult to start any very interesting topic: his eyes wandered about the apartments, as Lady Frances thought, with somewhat of an

appraiser-like anxiety to ascertain the value of the articles which had been brought into Severn Stoke by the temporary lord's upholsterers ; and the conversation could scarcely be kept clear of references to matters of business which it was necessary to transact. Then came the surrender of the diamonds that erst had lain on the toilette of my Lady Catherine — and Lady Frances, as she parted with them for ever, gazed at them, and shook them, and made them twinkle in the light ; and one could have seen, in the expression of her ladyship's countenance, a mingled grief and sorrow — as Shakspeare says,

“ Dumb jewels in their silent kind,
More than quick words do move a woman's mind ; ”

and certainly the agitation of her ladyship upon restoring — if that might be called restoring which was rendering up what never belonged to her — the casket, was not to be concealed. Truth to be told, there never was a much more melancholy night passed at Severn Stoke. George retired to his own room, and occupied an hour or two in tearing up and burning papers and letters, which had accumulated in the drawers of what, eight-and-forty hours before, he had fancied *his* library table ; for papers will accumulate — save and except bank-notes, which seem to have an inherent Malthusianism in their very nature.

Time wore on, and the carriages were ordered at different hours in the morning. — George, having been so unexpectedly deprived of the society of his friend the Doctor, abandoned his plan of going to London, and proposed proceeding immediately to Portsmouth, *via* Bath and Southampton ; and Mr. Snell, who intended remaining a few hours after the departure of George and his mother, for the purpose of arranging with the servants of the household, and giving the house into the charge of the local upholsterers, who had made out the inventory, was to quit Severn Stoke at about five or six in the afternoon, intending to reach Chipping Norton, to sleep at the inn there, in which there are more comfort and more pretty faces than might be reasonably expected, and treatment which heretics have no right to anticipate. There Snell determined to sleep — he liked the snuggerly of the place ; and the

curtained door of the bed-room so tickled his fancy, that, upon his return to London, he induced Mrs. S. to have a similar one fitted to their own chamber in Keppel Street, Bloomsbury.

Lady Frances was amongst the earliest up and ready for the start : her carriage — her servants — all she had ever had, were prepared for her ladyship's reception ; and she took special care, before her departure, to impress upon the mind of the said Snell that it was a matter of perfect indifference to *her* whether George had the barony or had it not ; — that she was on her way to her brother, the Marquis of Pevensey, at Grimsbury, and that she hoped to live to see her darling son cut out a peerage for himself with his own “good sword.” Indeed, her ladyship rallied prodigiously ; and, when she kissed George’s cheek, no tear was visible in her eye, although it was observed that immediately after she had seated herself in the carriage she pulled down the blinds, — whether to conceal her natural grief, or disappoint the gazers of the town through which she was to pass, history has not determined.

George had to write to Lovell, and the letter was an arduous and a painful task : he had to express how completely all his grandeur had vanished — how shorn he was of his dignities, and how deserted by his parasites and followers : he had to admit that, although he had descended to bow to the shrine of rank and connection, he had been spurned and rejected ; and that the example set by Emma Lovell upon a high principle had been followed by Lady Catherine upon an extremely low one. He had to announce his departure for sea — his separation, in all probability final, from the Lovells — his consequent disregard for what Mrs. Harbottle had bid him consider as her dying request, and to confess his own unworthiness in the course he had pursued, and proclaim the retributive justice by which his vacillating conduct had been rewarded. All this he had to do ; convinced now, more than ever, that Emma would refuse any thing like an advance on his part, even if he could so far humiliate himself as to appear before her, the beaten pretender to exalted rank, and the discarded suitor of illustrious beauty.

No, he was destined to be unhappy—his mother's pride had decided his fate, and he was bound to endure the consequences ; and the more he reflected upon the way in which, in point of fact, he had ventured to trifle with Miss Lovell's feelings, the more he felt convinced of the impossibility of overcoming her resolutions ; because, as has been argued over and over again in the course of this little narrative, the very fact of his doubting her excellence, and propriety, and even virtue — upon which doubts all his follies and all his excuses were grounded — was of itself so gross an insult, that she never would or could forgive it.

All he did in his letter to Lovell was to explain succinctly what had happened to deprive him of the honours which he had so briefly enjoyed, and to assure Mr. Lovell, *generally*, that every request of his should be attended to. He gave a programme of his future proceedings, and begged to receive a letter while he was at Portsmouth.

George still lingered about Severnstroke. He could scarcely believe that no note had been left by MacGopus : he wandered from room to room — not that he felt an unmanly or needless grief at quitting them as their owner — but because many eventful hours had passed within them ; and there was something melancholy in seeing the men jotting down the different articles of furniture, and measuring, and spanning, and stretching, and shaking, and putting every thing in order. However, all this feverish sensation was doomed to have an end ; and about two o'clock he quitted his lost paradise, having delivered it over to Snell, who took repossession of it and all its appurtenances in the name of its rightful owner.

The Captain — for so we must now call him — proceeded direct for Bath, which he expected to reach about ten o'clock. There he intended to sleep ; and thence, proceeding the next morning, he would reach Portsmouth in time for a late dinner. The morning after that, accoutred with his newly anchored epaulettes, he would commission his ship, and there establish himself till she was ready for sea — making the George his head-quarters, — devoting himself, heart and soul, to the work of fitting out.

All this was executed according to the design, and, by half-past eight o'clock on the second evening from his departure, the travelling chariot of Captain Sheringham — the coronets painted out by a coach-maker in the town near Severn Stoke — drove up to the door of the George, and the gallant Captain of H. M. S. Destructive was ushered into the parlour on the left-hand of the hall, which, although small and on the ground floor, possessed the striking recommendation of a blazing fire ; and wherein, without further ceremony, he resolved to ensconce himself, until he could “ rig himself out” in proper form to visit the Admiral in the morning, whose immediate proximity rendered his present quarters particularly convenient.

His mother said he had an elastic mind, and so he had — for, upon taking up the London newspaper of the day, in order to amuse himself while his dinner was getting ready, he found the whole detail of his discomfiture as to the peerage, and the subsequent sudden breaking off of the Malvern match, printed and published at full length for the edification of the town and country ; still his griefs were of a deeper caste — his cares of a more complicated character ; and the very fact that other thoughts occupied him, and other objects interested him, was, perhaps, the greatest blessing that could have befallen him.

His deeper sorrows were, however, suspended in the necessity of getting scarlet facings put to his uniform coat : having changed kings, the navy had changed colour since he had served. The buttons, too, which before had been in one shape, were now to be placed in another ; and the skirts were to be differently cut ; and there was to be no gold lace where there had been gold lace formerly ; and gold lace now where gold lace had never yet been, and his sword-belt was to be half an inch wider ; and the seam of his pantaloons an inch and a quarter narrower ; and he was not to wear a sword such as he had, but one with another sort of hilt ; and he was to “ bend” a differently shaped hat ; and a bullion-loop instead of a laced one — and so on, as the tailor told him, producing the corroborative regulations, stitched into a sort of pattern-book. All these details, and others of a similarly important nature, forced

the gallant Captain from the contemplation of his own personal hardships.

As he had renounced all patronage in the appointment of officers to the Destructive, he was saved much trouble in applications, and many painful necessities of refusal. He longed to be on board the hooker ; and really so busied himself in making out lists and memoranda of what he had to do "for the good of the service," that he scarcely recollects what he had so recently lost, or whence he had so suddenly fallen.

While the Captain is making his preparations, it may be necessary to state that Mr. Crabshaw, who was rather more of a dandy than a tutor need be, and who, as has been already stated, had taken the most violent offence at some observations of Lady Frances, which he thought applied more personally to himself than there was any necessity for, had arrived in Paris only eight hours before the young lord. His lordship, who was really attached to Crabshaw, naturally took his impressions from that gentleman's account of his relatives ; and that report coming after the constantly avowed dislike of his late father and mother for Lady Frances, induced the young nobleman at once to throw himself into the hands of his *Stultzified* Mentor, and agree to whatever course he thought fit to propose.

Crabshaw, who had consulted the lawyers previously to his departure, merely repeated what Messrs. Wickins, Snell, and Sibthorpe suggested, — that the safest and best way would be — more especially considering that the actual possession of the rents, estates, and property by the supposed Lord Weybridge would involve important matters of account — for Crabshaw, in the character of *prochain ami* to the young nobleman, to file a bill in Chancery, so as to make his lordship a ward of court ; — a measure which would at once put him out of any power or influence which George or his mother might be supposed to be desirous of exercising over him, and render the proceedings connected with pecuniary matters less irksome than if the case were not taken entirely under the Chancellor's jurisdiction.

Lord Weybridge, who had been received with the greatest kindness by our minister in Paris, and, indeed, remained

at his hotel during his stay in that city, thus took the most prudent step which could be suggested ; and of course rendered poor George liable, without hope of mitigation or any great delay, for all the expenditure in which he had indulged, and all the rents and proceeds which he had received, in order to defray the charges of maintaining the honour and character of a title which he vainly fancied his own.

But this was not the only rub he met with. The news of his degradation from the peerage had reached the Admiral before his arrival at Portsmouth ; and he found a letter from the First Lord, stating that, under the circumstances, he thought he could not expect the ship for which he had applied — that the promotion had been made, and the commission transmitted, under an idea that he actually was the person whom he had represented himself to be ; and that, although the Admiralty were not disposed to wound his feelings by making any alteration in their decision as far as his post-rank went, the ship was wholly out of the question.

Hereupon a correspondence ensued, in which George stated that he was authorised to commission the *Destructive* as a post-captain, and not as a peer ; and that it was a case which would admit of *no* equivocation. He was replied to ; the answer was bungling — it had all the demerit of being shabby without the redeeming quality of cleverness, and to loggerheads they went ; — and the First Lord at last finding it impossible to sneak out, and not being at that period entirely callous to shame, George was permitted to have his ship. But her destination was changed, and he was ordered to take out a governor, his lady, two daughters, one son (his aid-de-camp), another son (his secretary), three horses, two cows, four housemaids, a butler, and two footmen, together with one hundred and thirty-eight packages of all sorts, three pointers, and a Newfoundland dog : for all of which persons and things Captain Sheringham was ordered to make suitable accommodation.

Down went the bulkheads — up went the green-baize partitions ; — here was the governor's sleeping-cabin — his lady's sitting-cabin — and opposite, the young ladies' berth, which was death to them. Holes were cut in the deck for

stanchions for the aid-de-camp's cot, and the secretary's cot — a screened-off place was made up for the maids, and there were coops for the dogs, and a pen for the cows, and the horses were slung down into stalls, and four guns were run in, to make room for the stud — so that, what with the cattle, cats, canary-birds, men, maids, and materiel, H.M.S. Destructive looked more like Noah's Ark than any thing that has been since seen floating upon the face of the waters, except my Lord Mayor's barge on the river Thames when his lordship is graciously pleased to go swan-hopping.

All this George was forced to endure ; and luckily, too, for there were bustle, and excitement, and variety in all the proceedings connected with his departure, which diverted his thoughts from subjects in fact much nearer his heart.

The day of departure was at hand. His Excellency and family arrived at the George, and Sheringham proceeded to introduce himself : the aid-de-camp and the secretary proceeded on board, examined and reported most enthusiastically of the admirable accommodations, and endeavoured to cheer up the young ladies into something like composure at abandoning their native country, Almack's, and all the rest of it ; and nothing was wanting but a slight shift of wind from the south-west to separate them from all their dear friends and acquaintances in happy England.

On the morning following the arrival of the honourable exiles, George received two letters ; one from Lovell, couched in the most friendly terms, entreating George to bear up against the sports or rather frowns of fortune, assuring him of the deep interest he took in his welfare, and of the anxiety with which he should watch his progress. The old gentleman announced a change for the better in the health of their dear suffering friend ; and, to Sheringham's delight and surprise, concluded his welcome epistle by conveying him Emma's desire to be particularly remembered to him, as well as her best wishes for his happiness and prosperity.

It seemed to him — but it was almost impossible — as if she had begun to relent in her resolution to abandon him for ever ; and if there were any alloy to his pleasure

in receiving her good wishes, it arose from the apprehension that he was running away from a chance of happiness, and that he might have obtained her forgiveness and her hand if he had remained at home: that, however, was now past — it was all too late to think of what might have been. The first lieutenant had sent a note on shore to the Captain, to say he thought the wind was getting round to the northward, with a view to hurry the embarkation of the noble passengers; and such was George's anxiety to lose no time, that he had scarcely given himself a moment to open the second letter which was addressed to him. It proved, however, to be from MacGopus, from whom he had, to his infinite surprise and disgust, heard not one syllable since his abrupt departure from Severnstroke. It ran as follows: —

“ On board the Dolly, Woolwich, Jan. 1831.

“ Dear George :

“ You will see by the date of this that I am afloat. I shall pass you at Portsmouth, I hope, in three days from this, if the wind comes fair when we get into the Downs.

“ When I left your house I went to London, thinking I had interest to get the appointment of agent to one of the convict ships bound to New South Wales. I was right — but I did more — I found a friend who was just starting in this craft, who wished to remain in England for a month or six weeks longer: we effected an exchange; and here I am riding, at single anchor, with three hundred and twenty-four of the most desperate ruffians unhang'd under my charge.

“ Perhaps you have called me a brute for quitting you so abruptly; and perhaps you will think me a fool for taking to the water again after having dried my feathers. I will explain all that — I could not bear to see you in your unhappiness. I hate leave-taking — so much for my brutality. As for my folly — I had saved up about three thousand pounds during thirty years' service; upon the interest of which, with my half-pay and my small wants, I contrived to live pretty well; but I have work in me yet, and why should I lie idle? Your fall was a sudden

and a painful one to me. Your mother had told me how much involved she was, in consequence of fitting up and altering that jigameree cottage at the place where we went to the man's funeral who killed your friend. The attorney told me there would be a claim against you of nearly twenty thousand pounds. I thought to myself that was hard—it was no fault of yours—and I thought you would want money to fit you out and make a fresh start. I sold out my savings at no bad time either, and you will find enclosed a draft on the Bank of England for two thousand seven hundred pounds: take it. I appoint you my banker till I come home—if ever I do—if not, I shall not want it. I know you are as proud as Lucifer, and that's the reason why I did not send it to you till your anchor was a-peak, blue-peter up, and fore-topsail loose.

“ You cannot catch me, George ; and all I hope is, this will catch you in time to be of use. Nobody ever played his cards so badly as you have done ; but that's your affair. I don't mean to bore you with sermons, only rely upon it you have had a good escape from that Lady Catherine—or Catamaran, or whatever they call her.

“ I expect to get to Sydney somewhere about June, and if I can manage, when I have landed my cargo and I am turned adrift, to get home by Calcutta, I may have a chance of seeing you. Good-bye, dear Sheringham, and believe me always yours,

“ ANDREW MACGOPUS.”

“ Quære? why do they call your frigate the Destructive?”

George was quite overcome by reading this extraordinary letter—a letter at once characteristic of its writer's peculiarities, and illustrative of his higher qualities. The act it announced was princely, and George could not but reflect on the vast injustice he had for so many years done the character of his excellent friend.

To decline the offer made was impossible; it might jeopardise the money which the worthy man had placed at his disposal; George, therefore, repaid from that fund

some advances which he had required from his agent, and paid the remainder into his hands, determined to restore during his period of service that of which he had availed himself ; but he felt, however secure of repaying the Doctor his mere money, that he could never sufficiently exhibit his gratitude to a man who had overthrown the whole system, and scattered all the savings of his life for his sake, without hope of advantage or even security for his money.

All that was necessary to be done touching this matter Captain Sheringham did forthwith, and when he went on board the frigate he felt a longing hope that he might fall in with the Dolly in the Channel, although the prevalence of the south-westers rendered it improbable ; especially as H. M. S. Destructive took the earliest advantage of the change, and with her yards nearly square, scudded away before a fresh breeze at the rate of nine knots an hour.

Nautical scenes have of late years been so amply and admirably described, that it would be idle to attempt to say one word upon the subject of the proceedings of H. M. S. during her voyage to India. She experienced very little bad weather — touched at the Cape — remained there four days — and reached her destination on the seventh day of May, without having suffered any damage or loss of any of the passengers, except one cock canary bird, and his Excellency's Newfoundland dog. Barring these casualties, the reader may put his mind at rest, and picture the gallant frigate at anchor in Sagor Channel, in five fathoms water, about six miles to the northward of the Reef-buoy, waiting for a pilot.

As the captain and his ship are destined, according to the regulations of the service, to remain three years on the Indian station, we shall have plenty of time, during their absence from England, to cast our eyes upon what is going on at home.

CHAPTER XII.

Oh, name him not, unless it be
 In terms I shall not blush to hear ;
 Oh, name him not, though false to me,
 Forget not he was once so dear.
 Oh, think'of former happy days,
 When none could breath a dearer name ;
 And if you can no longer praise,
 Be silent, and forbear to blame.

He *may* be all that you have heard ;
 If prov'd, 'twere folly to defend :
 Yet pause ere you believe one word
 Breathed 'gainst the honour of a friend.
 How many seem in haste to tell
 What friends can never wish to know ;
 I answer — *once* I knew him well,
 And *then*, at least, it was not so.

T. HAYNES BAVLY.

THERE seemed something like a fate hanging over George's proceedings, connected with his attachment to Emma Lovell. — Her just resentment, and her father's natural indignation, were much weakened by the news of his "reduction" from the peerage, and of the difficulties which, it was very speedily known, would consequently accumulate upon him ; but what might have been the result of this change of sentiment, it was now vain and idle to consider ; the die was cast, and the gallant Sheringham was ploughing the deep.

Mrs. Harbottle, in her then state of exhaustion, could scarcely sufficiently exert herself to express her anger and vexation at the course he had pursued, after he had, by their own act, got disentangled from the connection with the Duchess and her daughter. Lovell and Emma, whom she had kept in profound ignorance of the nature and character of the communication she had made to him at Severn Stoke, could scarcely account for the energy she displayed, or the disappointment she avowed in discussing his later proceedings. But Fanny herself felt seriously grieved, that, after all she had openly said, and all she had not very mysteriously hinted, he had not, at least, made an effort to exculpate himself in the eyes of the being who still fondly loved him, and tried to reinstate himself in her favour,

knowing how earnestly his endeavours that way tending would have been seconded by his most friendly correspondent.

It seemed really as if the disappointment of her hopes and expectations, on this point, had more severely affected her than the severity of her own misfortunes: she felt that, in her own case, the evil was irremediable, the hope was past; but, in this affair the hope remained, and she felt assured that all the ills by which it was environed might have been overcome by a little prudence and consideration on the part of the most interested person, who, as it struck her, having escaped the real evil which had threatened his happiness, chose voluntarily to sacrifice himself to an imaginary misfortune.

So it was — he was gone — and three long tedious years were to pass before his return to England.

"That return," said Fanny, "I shall never see. Care and kindness, and the strength of my constitution, keep me up against the progress of my disorder, but I feel myself daily sinking from a world in which I have no wish to remain — every prospect of happiness, which I had myself anticipated has been blighted; and now the only gratification I looked for, in an endeavour to make the happiness of others, is frustrated.

In the meanwhile time went on, and the festive season at Grimsbury passed away, and Lord Pevensey's party broke up, and his lordship repaired to London to fulfil his parliamentary duties. The course which Lady Frances felt compelled to steer was somewhat more dubious and eccentric. — She had received, at Christmas, divers and sundry "lengthy bills" from the upholsterer, paper hangers, and decorators, &c.; accounts, most hieroglyphically constructed, from carpenters and joiners — hundreds of feet of plinths, at so much per foot, super.; circular dados grooved and backed; door-linings and soffets rebated on edge, three-pannelled and moulded and string-boards, with moulded nosings, mitred to risers; mahogany hand-rails to stairs, cross-handed cramps and knees, drift 19s. 6d. per foot running; triglyphs — common modillions — pilasters fluted with capitals, sash panes, &c. &c. &c.; plumbers and

plasterers, with all their quirks and wood-beads, and enrichments of cornices ; and painters and paviours — amounting, as has already been anticipated, to the gross produce of her ladyship's income for the next three years.

The delay in her ladyship's return to Binford, after her departure from Grimsbury, caused some little alarm to the expectant handicraftsmen ; but they waited patiently until they had received authentic accounts of her ladyship's having disposed of her lease of the cottage, with all the furniture as it stood, and of her having commenced a series of *soirées* (as the *élite* of the city call evening parties, and fancy it fine) at the pleasant and salubrious town of Boulogne-sur-Mer, to which fashionable watering-place her ladyship had removed for the benefit of "her health."

The young Lord Weybridge, who, on his arrival in England, had placed himself entirely in the hands of Mr. Crabshaw, took no kind of notice of his right honourable aunt : indeed, the character which her ladyship received at the hands of the tutor, followed up by the general *on dit* of her conduct with regard to the transactions at Binford, was not of a nature to induce him to seek out a branch of his family, against which it was most likely he should be compelled to enter into legal hostilities.

As the spring opened, Mrs. Harbottle, instead of rallying, appeared to grow weaker and weaker — her mind was constantly worried and agitated, and it was impossible to keep her from a constant recurrence to all that had passed of wretchedness during the last year. Lovell, without whose society and that of his daughter she could not have existed, had been peculiarly fortunate in making an arrangement with the incumbent of a parish near Sidmouth, who gladly exchanged duties with him for six months, after his own full period of absence from Binford had expired ; and although Emma cast many a thought of affectionate regret upon her little establishments in her own village, she did all she could by insuring the paternal kindness of her father's substitute there — while she set her parishioners the example of benevolence and charity, by devoting all the time she could spare from the invalid to the institutions of a

similar nature, which had been established in the beautiful and romantic village where they were now located.

Fanny's health still declined. — It is needless to pain the reader's heart by describing the gradual decay which one has so often, anxiously yet hopelessly, watched in young and delicate creatures like herself. The progress of her disorder was gentle, but sure ; and the only point in which her case seemed to differ from others, which have so often wrung the hearts of fond and affectionate friends and relations, appeared to exist in the circumstance of her being fully aware of the seriousness of her condition. Thus prepared for the awful change which she was conscious awaited her, she lingered under the fostering care of her devoted friends until the middle of August, when she resigned her spirit into the hands of Him who gave it, and her last breath was expended in a prayer for the happiness of her friends and the forgiveness of her enemies.

The doubts and apprehensions under which Mr. Lovell laboured with respect to the disposition of her property, were cleared up a few hours before her death. Her object in inducing them to precede her in the journey to Minehead (a circumstance which we noticed at the time) had not been one of selfish consideration for her own ease and comfort. She proposed this temporary separation, in order that she might take that opportunity of making a will, under legal advice and instruction, by which she bequeathed, with the exception of one legacy to her aunt Jarman, the whole of her property, real and personal, to her "beloved and devoted friend, Emma Lovell."

The reader may have naturally anticipated this proceeding, having had the advantage of seeing the letter which she wrote to George while at Severnstoke ; but aware as she was of the delicacy of Emma's feelings, and anxious that the world should be convinced of the disinterestedness of her kindness and that of her excellent parent, she never divulged one syllable of her intentions to either of them on the subject.

Thus ended the life of an ill-fated, kind-hearted woman ; and pure, and good, and exemplary as she was, her fate should be a caution to those who, without the least ill in-

tention; give way to feelings which, when once they are suffered to make head against principle and resolution, are most difficult to overcome. She had not sinned — but she had erred ; and venal as her crime had been, it had, proximately or remotely, brought death and sin upon those who were most nearly allied to her, and drew down grief and desolation upon herself and on her house. Blame not — censure not — for ye are weak yourselves — but pity and forgive — and, above all, take warning.

The accession to so vast a fortune as that of which Emma was now mistress, had not the startling effect upon “the Parson’s Daughter” which might have been expected. In fact, she did not comprehend the extent of her possessions — nor did her mind, at ease with what she had, and seeking only to do good within her sphere, at once grasp the importance of the change which had occurred to her : indeed, the loss of her friend, and, for a long time past, her only companion, was to her a blow, the weight of which the accession of all this wealth could but slightly alleviate. Fanny knew her heart to its very core — they had been strangely mixed up in each other’s distresses — she could talk of Sheringham to *her*, and she loved to hear her speak of *him* : different her father — but she was gone, and the only consolation she had in her sorrows was torn from her.

The remains of the unhappy widow were interred in the church of which Lovell was the temporary minister ; and, immediately after the affecting ceremony, the Rector returned to his daughter at their residence, and almost immediately afterwards quitted it on their road homewards. It may sound strange, perhaps — but Emma, under the circumstances of her affliction, felt that she should be comparatively easier at Binford, excluded from the world, in the scenes of her former happiness, than anywhere else ; but time, and the exercise of human reason and of pious resignation, were wanting to alleviate a grief, the like of which Emma had never felt since her poor mother died.

What may be the extent of the power and influence of sympathy, it is not for us poor finite creatures to know ; but we may venture to relate facts, and permit speculative

philosophers to draw their own conclusions. At the period of Fanny's melancholy death and Emma's consequent distress, George Sheringham lay stretched on a bed of sickness at Calcutta, whence it was found impossible to remove him.

During the voyage his spirits had been dreadfully affected: there had arisen some squabbling differences amongst his noble passengers, and thence between them and himself, and he was worried, and became nervous and dejected: they fell into extremely hot weather, and he was attacked with fever, from which he never entirely recovered. On reaching Fort William his illness increased, and in so alarming a degree that the physicians declared nothing likely to save his life but his proceeding, as soon as practicable, to a cooler climate, and their opinion was, that nothing short of England could avail.

He remained, however, until the end of November before there seemed a chance of removing him with safety. He had been invalidated from the command of his frigate, and a passage was secured for him in an Indiaman; but George lingered on, in hopes of the promised arrival of MacGopus, in whose society he felt he should be much happier than with strangers, and of whose medical skill he had moreover the highest opinion: but it was not to be: the uncertainties necessarily attendant upon voyages of such a length, and the variability of seasons — of weather — of wind — and, indeed, of opportunities, somehow prevailed against their meeting; and, early in the month of December, the poor Captain was conveyed from his bungalow to the Hoogly, in his palanquin, and thence shipped in his budgerow, in which he proceeded to embark in the vessel which was to convey him to what every body who saw him felt assured would be his grave.

Those, however, who anticipated this conclusion to his career were fortunately disappointed: he was considerably restored by the voyage, and before they reached St. Helena, at which place they touched, he was able to walk without assistance; and when he went ashore there, with the aid only of a friend's arm, he proceeded on foot from the landing-place to the hotel. This walk, however,

paid him for the effort ; for what should greet his eyes, as he passed across the square from the castle to the inn, but a tall, black-haired man, sitting curled up at a window, airing himself, reading a two-year old number of Blackwood. — He thought he knew him at a glance — but he could scarcely trust his eyes, — not that it was an unlikely place to find him — he however looked again, and when he saw upon a little table beside him a round black snuff-box, and a tall brown tumbler of brandy-and-water, he was convinced — it was the truant Doctor — Andrew MacGopus himself.

" You are a pretty fellow to make an appointment," said George, as firmly as he was able (having, thanks to the Doctor's near-sightedness, got within reach of him unseen), giving him a huge slap on the shoulder at the same time.

" Dunce ! " cried the Doctor — " is it you — my dear George ? — how are you ? — eh — where's Destructive ? — what's the matter ? — are you ill ? "

" You must decide that question," said Sheringham : " they say I am — or at least was, very ill — but, thank God, I am better."

" I am not sure of that," said MacGopus ; " show me your tongue — let me feel your pulse. I want to know how you are."

" And I," said Sheringham, " want to know why you are here, instead of having, according to promise, come to me at Calcutta, or followed me, as I know you would if it had been necessary, to Madras ? "

" Why," said the Doctor, " in the first place, we got bedevilled in a gale of wind going out, and were forced to run for Rio : there we were kept upwards of two months for repairs, and Old Nick knows what : the Dolly is a dull sailer, and we did not get to Sydney till the end of October : in ten days I was on board a ship bound to Calcutta — and, in twelve days more, I found the people in her were beasts : in three weeks after that, I kicked the doctor and pulled the skipper's nose, for which he is going to trounce me at law when he gets to England. We fell in with a country ship, the Highgolightly, homeward

bound — so I packed up my traps — out jolly-boat, and aboard of her — and here I am — and there she is,” added MacGopus, pointing to a great, square brute, like a collier, with her masts each raking from the other, like the sticks of a fan, or the uplifted hand of Three-Fingered Jack — of Mosely memory.

At their first rencontre George affected to be jocose ; but when he and MacGopus were seated alone together, in the *cheap, clean, and convenient* hostelry of James Town — a house which blends comfort and economy in the most surprising way, he did not lose a moment in expressing, in terms such as MacGopus did not desire to hear, his gratitude for the unexampled kindness and consideration he had evinced.

Their conversation became more and more interesting, and the Doctor discovered (which, if he had thought upon the subject, he must previously have known) that the Captain had not yet heard the news, which he had seen in the English papers since his arrival at St. Helena, of the death of Mrs. Harbottle.

“ Ah,” said George, “ then there ends my last hope about Emma. Fanny, perhaps, might have prevailed upon her to receive a repentant sinner — a returned truant — but now — ”

“ She would not receive you,” said MacGopus, “ if you had the whole bench of bishops at your heels — so don’t fret about that.”

“ My dear MacGopus,” said George, “ I can neither argue nor confute. I regret the loss of that poor amiable woman ; and feeling myself so much mixed up in affairs nearest her interests — ”

“ Quære, now — how ?” said the Doctor.

“ Why, am I not her husband’s executor ?” said George.

“ If you had been his executioner, you would have done no great harm,” replied MacGopus.

“ Come now, my dear friend — for so indeed and truly have you proved yourself,” said George — “ let us endeavour to agree — and above all, in one point — namely, that of your immediately shifting your quarters out of

that most lumbering craft, the Highgolightly, into the Honourable Company's ship, Sir Timothy Wadd—in which, as there is a cabin to spare, we can accommodate you."

"I can't do that," said the Doctor; "because, three days after I came on board the Highgolightly, I quarrelled with all the passengers, and sent them all to 'Coventry.' And I can't leave her till we get to England, lest I should make them too happy, and they should think I was deserting my principles."

"Psha!" said Sheringham, "what idle trash!—come to us—come to *me*? You have put it out of my power to doubt your friendship—come—"

"Ah!" said MacGopus, "to be sure, you are ill—and sad—and sorry. I'll just step over to Portis's, and see the skipper—give him my opinion of his passengers, and send my traps on board. Quære—what d'ye call the Hon. Company's ship?"

"The Sir Timothy Wadd," said Sheringham, "which, I assure you, with the hencoops and bottle-racks stowed amid-ships, and the Honourable John Company's stripes flying, had once the honour of being taken for an American seventy-four."

"None of your jibes, Master George," said MacGopus; "recollect what Dance did to Linois, before you were born or soon after. These fellows may be tea-dealers for all I know; but rely upon it, whenever there's occasion for it, they'll try what their gunpowder can do to save their hyson."

"A pun, Mac," said George.

I believe it's the first I ever let," said MacGopus: it shall be the last."

It is curious to witness natural effects. Never was a hydrangia, hanging its cauliflower head, more rapidly revived into a state of erect healthfulness by a gallon of water, than was the Captain re-invigorated by thus meeting with his excellent Doctor. He had confidence in his friendship and faith in his skill, and the change worked in his spirits, and consequently (since the greatest part of his disorder was nervous) upon his health, was miraculous.

Their arrangements completed, away bowled the H.C.S. Sir Timothy Wadd, bearing within her ample ribs the convalescent George and his invaluable but extraordinary friend.

The art and science of navigation are now brought to such a nicety, and more especially in the East India Company's service, where every officer undergoes a course of probationary work to fit him for his duty, that it would interest a reader quite as much to give him the history of the journey of an omnibus from Paddington to the Bank, as it would to present him with the log of this Sir Timothy Wadd : the only difference between the passages is the frequency of touching in the one case, which does not certainly occur so often in the other : however, the end justifying the means, and the means having produced a more justifiable end, we have only need to know that the aforesaid Sir Timothy Wadd reached Deal in the middle of the night, between the first and second of June, when it was just sufficiently light for MacGopus to make out the outlines of the land, and congratulate himself that he was back again in bonny England.

George Sheringham and his friend landed immediately, and proceeded to Mr. Wright's at Dover, whence, when they had rested themselves for the night, they proposed to proceed to London. All these intentions were fulfilled, and in the morning they quitted the Ship Inn for the metropolis, George so wonderfully recovered from his severe illness as only to exhibit proofs of improved health — and MacGopus in a humour which deserved to be recorded with the whitest of all stones.

The intelligence of Sheringham's having been invalidated had reached England in the preceding January or February, and consequently his London agent, instead of forwarding his letters, had retained them all ; so that, upon his arrival at his office, he found, literally, heaps of correspondence. To open these communications in any thing like chronological order was a vain attempt ; and therefore, taking a whole summer's day to read through them, he received facts the most incongruous, and intelligence the most anomalous. He found, however, that his mother

had been driven to the opposite coast, and that the person to whom she had sold her house at Binford had paid no rent to the original landlord, that every thing there was in a dreadful state of confusion, and that the aristocratic name of Sheringham did not stand quite so high as it previously had done in those parts. He found, moreover, several letters from Mr. Snell, stating in different forms that the Court of Chancery had called upon all persons in account with the estate of Lord Sheringham to pay up the amount of his claims forthwith ; and he found himself threatened, on his arrival in England, with a process to enforce that payment; which would instantly deprive him of his liberty, and consign him to prison for life, or at least until the claim was satisfied.

Poor George ! — how highly had his expectations been exalted — how deeply had they fallen ! — What was he to do ? — Follow his mother, whose flight from England had so seriously annoyed him — or consent to remain a captive during his whole existence ? — and all these perils and difficulties had fallen upon him without his having committed one single act of vice or folly. One letter at length caught his eye — the writing of the superscription was familiar to it — he broke it open and read —

“ Grosvenor-Square, Sept. 18. 1832.

“ My Dear Captain Sheringham,

“ I write this letter, and, according to advice which I have received at the Admiralty Office, direct it to be left at your agent's, so that it may catch you as soon as you reach London. Many things have happened since your departure from amongst us — some, I fear, most disagreeable in their nature ; as far as I am able, I shall have great pleasure in smoothing over difficulties which may threaten your personal comfort and peace of mind.

“ I conclude you are acquainted with the death of our excellent suffering friend, Mrs. Harbottle — her heart was broken, and she sank under her afflictions. You, perhaps, do not know that she has bequeathed the whole of her vast property to my daughter ; and still more, perhaps, shall I surprise you, when I tell you that my child has

purchased the house whence I date this, from your successor, the present Lord Weybridge, who, it appears, under the persuasion of Mr. Crabshaw, his tutor, prefers a residence in France to one in England, and has, after a short residence in London, returned to Paris for a permanency.

" That we should be in possession of a residence which you intended for yourself, may, according to your view of the case -- or may not be — a reason why we should solicit the pleasure of seeing you in it ; but that is matter for after-consideration.

" Mrs. Harbottle, whose interest in you was extremely strong, conscious of the involvements in which the extraordinary circumstances of your temporary possession of the title and estates of Weybridge would infallibly entangle you, bequeathed to me, in trust, such a sum as should entirely clear you from all difficulties on that score ; and I have great pleasure in informing you, that, in pursuance of her dying request, I have paid over to the account of the present Lord Weybridge, by the hands of Messrs. Wickins, Snell, and Sibthorpe, the sum of twenty-one thousand three hundred and seven pounds, eighteen shillings, and ten pence, being the full and entire amount of their claim against you." —

" What on earth have I done," said George, his eyes overflowing with tears, " to deserve this of any human being !" He took up the letter again, and resumed : —

" All that our dear friend added after she had expressed her wish with regard to this point, was — ' entreat him to remember what he knows I considered my dying request at the time I made it.' "

George could read no farther at the moment — too well did he remember the dying request — too well did he know that he could not now fulfil it. What a metamorphosis — the Lovells domesticated in what was once his house — Binford exchanged for Grosvenor Square ! Every thing seemed to conspire against him — now would he be spurned, rejected, and disdained indeed. He read : —

" My daughter, who has suffered greatly from illness since the death of her poor friend, is somewhat better. We shall be happy if you *will* come to us here, should we be in London when you arrive. I ought, perhaps, to add, that I have resigned my living at Binford in favour of my excellent and exemplary curate, and too happy was I to find the good bishop of my diocese ready to second my wishes for the promotion and happiness of as deserving a man as ever lived."

" What am I to do, MacGopus ? " said George to the Doctor.

" Go to them," said the Doctor ; " they have hearts — they have souls — God bless them ! — go to them."

" What ! " said George, " to the Parson's Daughter ? "

" Yes," replied MacGopus ; " do you hesitate ? "

" No," said Sheringham.

" If you do," said MacGopus, " read this, or let me read it. It's merely a paragraph out of a newspaper ; will you hear it ? "

" If it's not long — yes."

" The lady who last week eloped from her ancient husband, with Captain Fuztip, of the Lancers, is, we regret to say, the lovely and accomplished Lady C — H — , daughter of the Duchess of M — . Is not that consolatory ? And now, my friend, I will tell you another fact. The picture that dear creature painted of you, and which she or her mother crammed behind the sofa when she found out you were not a lord, is now stuck over the door of a beer-shop not forty yards from the gates of Severnstroke, and does duty for the sign of Leopold, King of the Belgians. This I have just heard. Go — go — go ! " —

" Hang the picture," said George ; " what do I care ? But tell me, do you think Emma will receive me ? — and to my own house ? How strange ! "

" Quere — how your own ? " — said the Doctor ; " it never was your's, you never had any right to it, go along."

" Come with me," said George.

"I will."

And so they went — either of them commanding the other, and neither exactly knowing what they were going for. They quarrelled a good deal on the way, and the only thing in which they really agreed was in arriving at the door of the house at the same moment. MacGopus knocked — Sheringham rang ; thus for once they pulled together. Lovell was at home : they were admitted. The worthy man, unaltered in his manner, received them both cordially. George trembled as he had never done before in his life ; a thousand ideas rushed into his mind ; a thousand recollections, a thousand fears, and all the consciousness of what was past.

Lovell saw it all.

"My dear Sheringham," said the venerable and excellent man, "the last year or two of your life have been marked by strange vicissitudes and events of great importance, for little people, have fallen upon those with whom you have been intimately connected. All *that* is past : now hear me. You are going to see Emma — the best of children — devoted to her father as her father is devoted to her. Mark me ; she is too full of feeling — too much overpowered by the prospect of this interview, to speak ; I must therefore speak for her. Your mutual attachment has long been known to me : all this you are aware of — there needs no discussion on that point. You recollect our last conversation ?"

"Perfectly, sir," said Sheringham.

"At that period," said Lovell, "she had established a principle which I entirely approved : she acted upon it, and I supported her ; but never, from the moment she first was conscious of your defection, did she attribute the alteration in your conduct to yourself. I speak here to you, and before our friend — for so let me call him — openly and without disguise ; she knew the workings of that powerful influence under which you permitted yourself to be led away and estranged. All this, which she believed, has been brought more fully to her knowledge since. But she respected the motives which induced the exercise of that influence, and shrank from the idea of op-

posing it. Now, I repeat, that is past. Time has done all that was necessary to establish her first belief; and for the rest, all is forgiven — all forgotten."

" Oh, sir," said George, " how have I deserved this ? "

" That Emma herself must tell you," said her father. " She feels, and I feel too, that matters are changed, and that she now can — and I can justly and honourably permit her to do so — become a member of your family without being looked upon as an unwelcome intruder. As to *your* conduct, which might be inexplicable to others, she justifies it in your filial devotion. She always held that opinion — she always vindicated you upon that consideration. The first impulse of her heart will be — if all goes as I pray it may — to place Lady Frances, who so much misunderstood her, in the enjoyment of ease, content, and happiness, of which I fear her exorbitant and ravenous creditors have, for the present, deprived her."

" My dear sir," said George, " what am I to say — am I to believe this real ? "

" Here," said the Rector, throwing open the door of the adjoining room, " is the living witness to the truth of all I have said."

And there stood Emma, looking more lovely than ever — trembling with agitation, and the hope — the dread — the joy of seeing George. Words would not have answered in such a position of affairs. Lovell had spoken — he had told his daughter's story. Sheringham rushed forward, and caught her to his heart — she burst into tears, and her head sunk on his shoulder.

MacGopus, who, as we know, had previously proved himself so true a friend, maintained his character on the present occasion, and shut to the door of the next room, and engaged Lovell in gentle converse.

" Never," said MacGopus, " was there a more noble creature than that, sir — proud indeed may you be of such a daughter. While George was great, and high, and mighty, she scorned and repulsed him ; now that he is a beggar, she receives him to the heart in which her first affection was cherished. Go into his family with discredit !

— be regarded by them with coldness — no ! she enters it triumphantly.”

Lovell took the hand of MacGopus, and pressed it fervently. George and Emma joined them in a moment afterwards. She, poor girl, was incapable of uttering a word ; — George, nearly overcome, rallied strength enough to stammer out — “ this — this is indeed the happiest moment of my life.

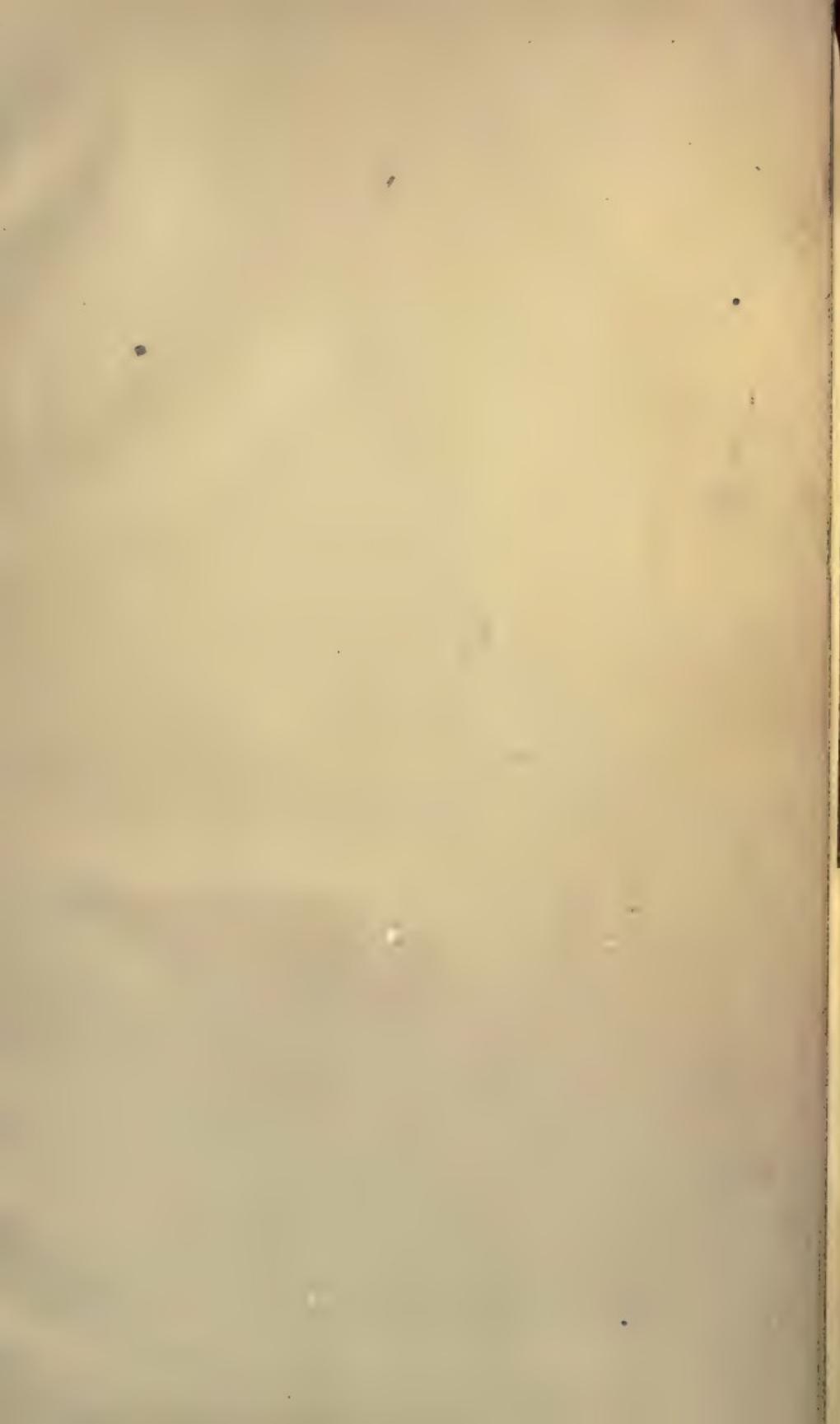
“ No such thing,” said MacGopus, taking hold of the trembling Emma, and supporting her on his arm ; “ — quere, now — won’t you be happier when you are married ? ”

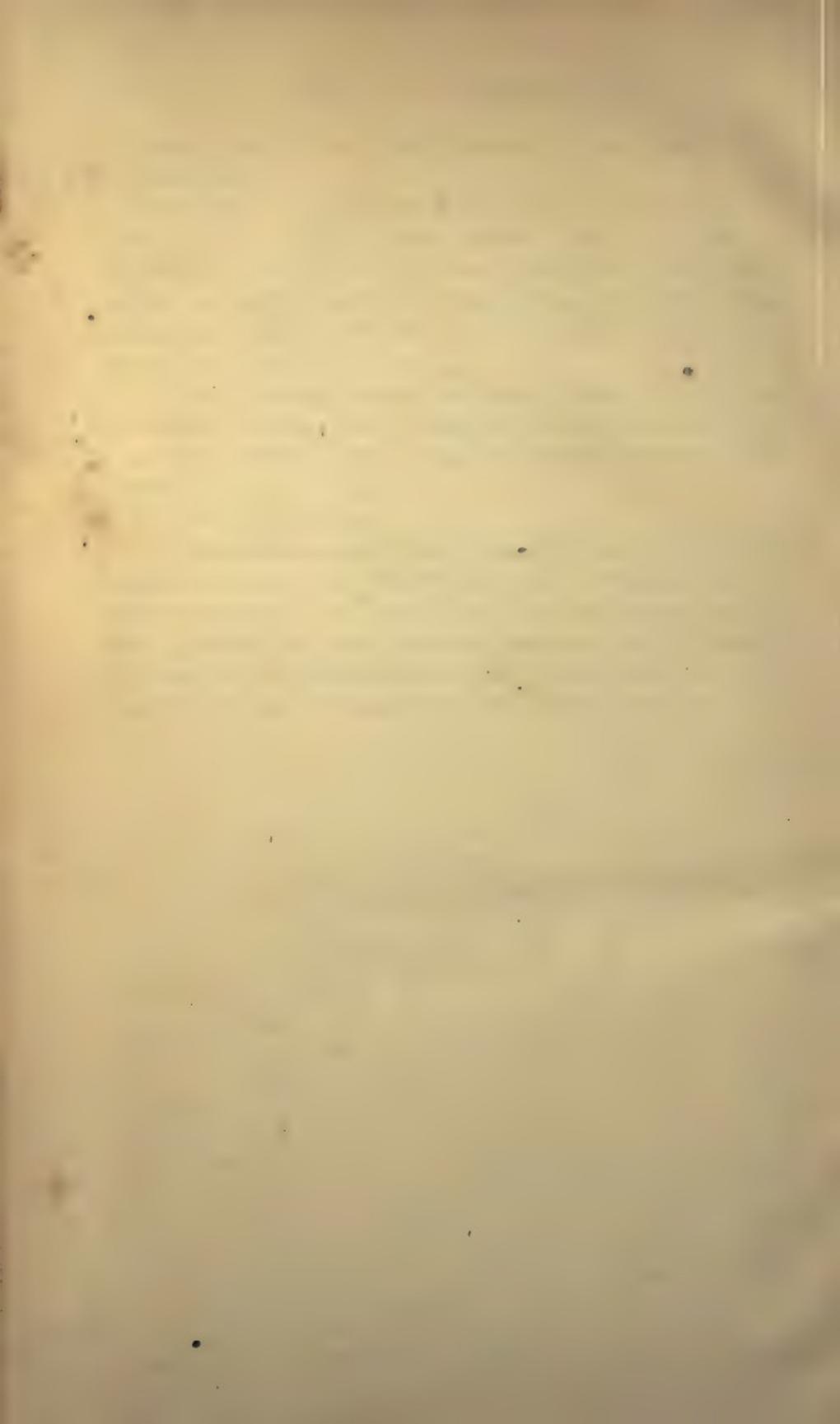
They were all happy.

That the event added much to such felicity, it is scarcely possible to say ; but the truth is, that in less than two years the young Lord Weybridge died, and George became really possessed of the title and estates, the “ PARSON’S DAUGHTER ” became a Peeress of the realm, and her husband the happiest man and the best father living.

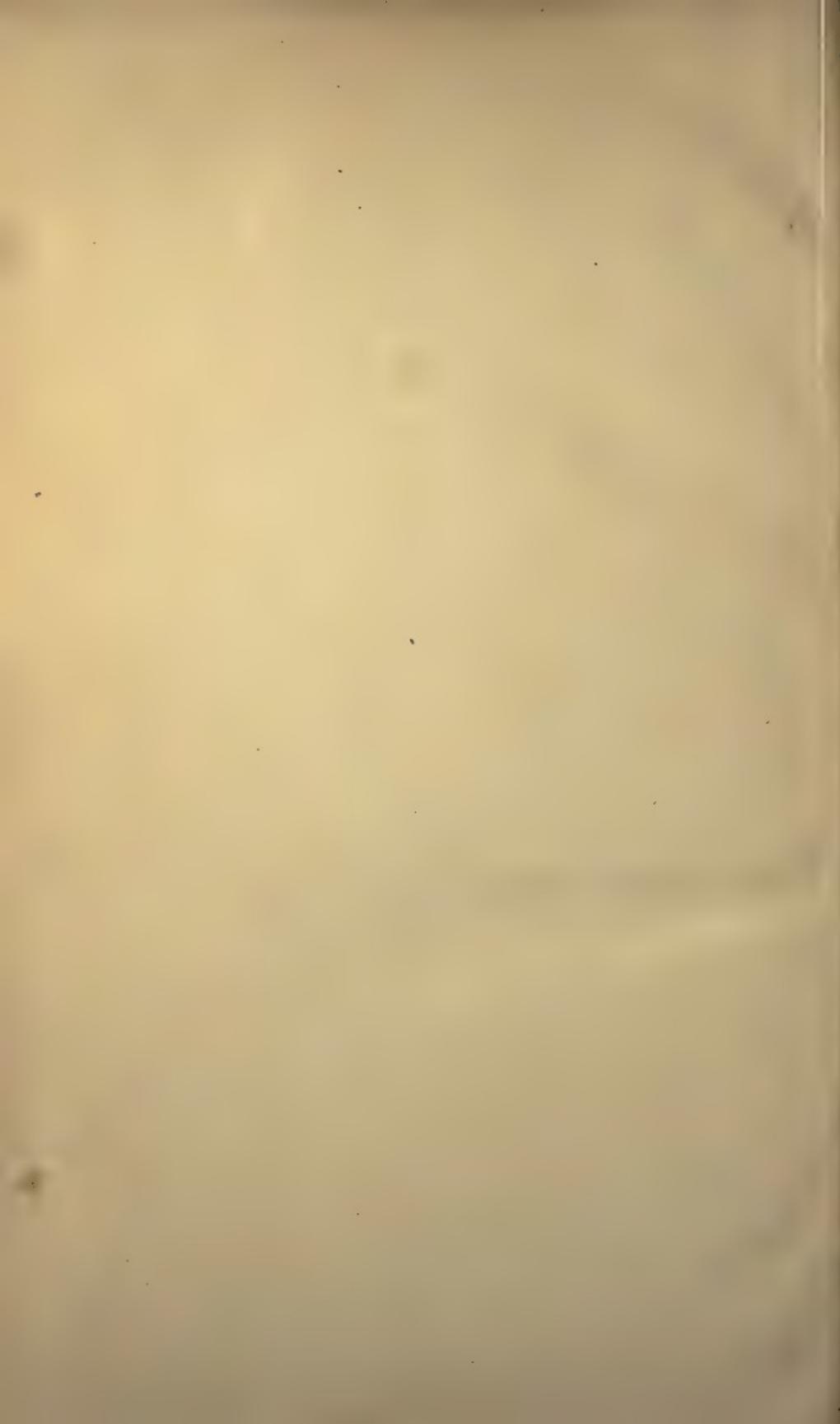
THE END.

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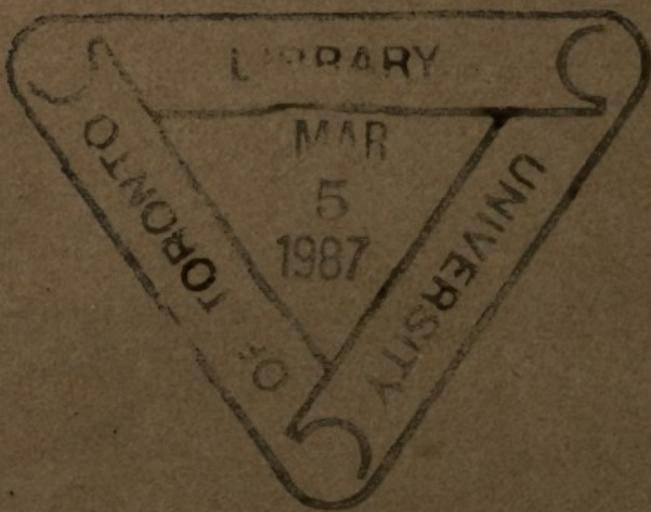












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